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## Human levitation

Simon B. Harvey-Wilson  
*Western Australian College of Advanced Education*

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## **Abstract**

Human levitation occurs when the physical body rises into the air and then hovers or moves around, seemingly in defiance of the force of gravity. Traditionally most levitation reports have originated from seven groups: shamanism, people supposedly possessed by demonic spiritual entities, those subjected to poltergeist activity, Spiritualism, people who believe they have been abducted by aliens, martial arts such as qigong and mysticism. These anecdotal reports generally describe levitation as rare, spontaneous and involuntary, although some people seem able to levitate at will. So far almost no scientific research appears to have been conducted into this phenomenon. In order to persuade empirical sciences such as parapsychology that human levitation warrants further investigation, this qualitative study contains two components. Firstly, there is a thematic comparison of historical and modern levitation reports from the seven groups to see what physical, cultural and phenomenological circumstances they may have in common. Three kinds of evidence have been examined in this comparison: general features of the groups that produce levitation reports; interviews about paranormal phenomena such as levitation with a sample of Christian priests and pastors, Spiritualists and qigong instructors; and six people who claim to have levitated have also been interviewed. Secondly, to assist future researchers in their investigations, the thesis includes a hypothesis generating exercise which seeks clues from the thematic comparison and interviews as to how human levitation might work. The conclusions reached in the thematic comparison are that most members of the seven groups believe in one or more spiritual realms that contain entities and/or energies that can facilitate paranormal phenomena such as human levitation. Members of some groups (eg: shamans, Spiritualists, qigong practitioners and mystics) may deliberately seek to interact with or access these entities or powers, while others (eg: poltergeist activity and spirit possession) may encounter them involuntarily. It also appears that, regardless of which group they belong to, all those who levitate, whether deliberately or involuntarily, do so while in an altered state of consciousness (ASC). The hypothesis-generating exercise, therefore, postulates that certain ASCs facilitate human levitation, and that further research into the capacity of consciousness to access what appears to be transcendent or transpersonal powers is recommended.

### **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank all the interviewees for their cooperation. Thank you also to my supervisors Dr Pat Baines, Dr Anne Harris and Dr Alan Tapper for their patience, support and encouragement.

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## Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Princess Pemà Chöki, the daughter of a Himalayan maharajah, claims that as a young girl she would regularly visit her uncle, a famous thaumaturge:

He was the most extraordinary man I have ever met. ... He did what you would call exercises in levitation. I used to take him in a little rice. He would be motionless in mid-air. Every day he rose a little higher. In the end he rose so high that I found it difficult to hand the rice up to him. I was a little girl, and had to stand on tip-toe. (in Maraini, 1951/2000, p.52)

Reports of human levitation such as this have evoked awe, bewilderment or disbelief throughout history but for most of that time the phenomenon has been regarded as having no significant practical or social purpose. Today, modern technology is increasingly producing devices that lift off the ground or fly, such as magnetic levitation trains, hang-gliders, jet planes, rockets, satellites and space craft. If human levitation is ever proved to exist, and if it involves an energy that can nullify or overcome gravity, it may have significant scientific implications, but it has never been seriously researched by any academic discipline.

Olivier Leroy (1928) claims that, according to ancient traditions, "The human body is able ... to be raised from the ground, to remain suspended in mid-air without any visible prop, and sometimes move about in it, without any traceable action of any physical force" (p.v). *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) defines levitation as "The action or process of rising, or raising (a body), from the ground by 'spiritualistic' means" (p.870). The verb 'levitate' was first used in this sense in England in 1875 (p.870). Prior to that there was apparently no specific term to describe the phenomenon. *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (Aumann, 2003) defines levitation as "the suspension of a material body in the air without any visible support, in apparent opposition to the law of gravity" (p.522). The encyclopaedia also claims that the three possible causes of levitation are God, the devil, or an unknown natural force. Guiley (1991), on the other hand, defines levitation as "a phenomenon of psychokinesis (PK) in which objects, people, animals ... lift up into the air without known physical means and float or fly about" (p.327). These definitions illustrate that, although there is general agreement about its physical characteristics, whatever causes levitation is still the subject of

speculation. This research project concentrates on human levitation; it does not discuss non-human levitation. While acknowledging that there are various spiritual and religious explanations for human levitation, I adopt the perspective that it is probably the same mechanism or energy that levitates everyone. Most parapsychologists refer to human levitation as a psychokinetic (PK) phenomenon. This term originally meant movement by the mind or mind-over-matter but today it is used by researchers as a convenient, neutral word to describe a variety of paranormal phenomena without the assumption that they exist or how they might work. The word psychokinesis (PK) will be used in this sense throughout this thesis.

Examples of what may be partial human levitation or possible precursors to levitation are also occasionally reported. For example, there are claims that some martial arts practitioners can become unusually light or almost immovably attached to the ground. Bonewits (1974) suggests that levitation "might have some connection with the traditional skills of Eastern adepts in making objects heavier or lighter, something we could call *Mass Control*" (p.43). Walking on water might be an example of mass control. Becoming immovable or much heavier than normal, referred to as "excessive gravitation" (Melton, 2001, p.909), is also reported to occur involuntarily to visionaries or religious ecstasies (Cornwell, 1991, p.143) and in some instances of spirit possession (Guiley, 1989, p.119). Becoming heavier or leaping higher or for longer than normal is harder to distinguish from average behaviour than full levitation, which suggests that the force involved is capable of integrating smoothly with routine human movement. Although they do not fall within the definition of levitation, examples of mass control and excessive gravitation will be discussed during this research because they may provide clues about the nature of human levitation.

Most encyclopaedias of the paranormal mention levitation, but so far I have only been able to locate three books on the subject (Charles & Jordan, 1995; Leroy, 1928; Richards, 1980) and of these only Leroy's is scholarly, although it suffers from significant religious bias. Apart from the controversial nature of the subject, one reason for this neglect may be that it is unclear which academic discipline should study human levitation. Parapsychology might seem the most appropriate, but I have been unable to find a parapsychologist anywhere in the world who is currently researching this subject. The headline of a January 2002 *New Scientist* magazine cover story reads, "Anti-gravity: Can the heretics turn physics upside

down?" (Cohen, 2002, p.25). The article claims that NASA intends to spend US\$600,000 on investigating whether it is possible to create a device to shield physical matter from the force of gravity. Apart from turning physics upside down, such an anti-gravity discovery could have enormous implications for the future of transportation and space exploration, yet NASA does not seem to be interested in spending any money investigating human levitation which might also involve a force that could shield or counteract gravity.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

Human levitation appears to have been almost completely ignored by the academic community. The purpose of this qualitative study is to persuade empirical researchers (eg: parapsychologists) that the phenomenon of human levitation is sufficiently credible to warrant further investigation, and to provide them with enough information to commence their research. This will be done by mirroring parapsychology's three basic concerns, which Dr Harvey Irwin (2004, p.7) claims are authenticity, underlying process and phenomenology. By 'authenticity' he means whether the phenomenon being investigated is "ontologically real" (p.7). In his opinion, because parapsychology is a scientific discipline, the authenticity issue "properly can only be resolved in the scientific laboratory" (p.7), although he believes that it is appropriate to investigate how a so-called paranormal phenomenon might work even if its authenticity has not yet been proven (p.8). However, it is unlikely that anyone would receive funding or be motivated to research human levitation within a laboratory unless preliminary research elsewhere had demonstrated that it is reasonable to believe that the phenomenon exists, and has made suggestions as to how the laboratory research might proceed. This research project will not attempt to prove that any individual levitation report is genuine. It will only address the authenticity question to the degree required to persuade empirical researchers that the phenomenon is sufficiently convincing to warrant further investigation. Instead of ignoring the slowly increasing body of human levitation reports, as the empirical sciences are doing, this project will study them primarily to seek information that relates to Irwin's underlying process and phenomenology components.

So, although this is not a parapsychology investigation of human levitation by mirroring that discipline's basic concerns, it will hopefully persuade other researchers to take the subject more seriously. By providing details about the

groups that traditionally produce levitation reports it may assist them in finding someone who can levitate, and provide them with some helpful research hypotheses. In summary, the two main components of this research project are:

- 1) A thematic comparison of historical and modern human levitation reports, and of the groups that have traditionally produced them, to see what physical, cultural and phenomenological circumstances the levitators and their groups may have in common.
- 2) A hypothesis-generating exercise that seeks clues that might begin to explain what causes human levitation. This information may assist future researchers to investigate the dynamics of levitation from a more empirical perspective.

### **1.3 Research Perspective**

I am undertaking this study because I believe that some human levitation reports are true and would like to investigate the matter further. Admittedly, some levitation reports may be the result of hagiographic exaggeration, delusions, confusion, or dishonesty, but, on the other hand, one suitably documented example of levitation would authenticate the phenomenon. Unlike many sceptics I do not adopt the attitude that most paranormal reports are fictitious because science cannot at present explain them. Heath (2003) writes that "it is inappropriate to ignore reports of levitation simply because we do not want to have to consider how they fit into our current model of the world" (p.17). It is myopic, illogical and unscientific to claim that something is impossible if it has not been seriously investigated and, as Brian Inglis (1979, p.519) points out, scientists have always been aware that the study of anomalies can lead to significant discoveries. I believe that research into psi<sup>1</sup> is important because, if these events really do occur, they reveal that current scientific explanations about the nature of reality are incomplete. But, as parapsychologist Richard Broughton (1991) notes, "From the discovery of anomalies — pieces that do not fit into the prevailing scientific picture — to the general acceptance of a revised picture that makes sense of the anomalies, is often a long and difficult road" (p.77). The physicist Dr Claude Swanson explains that

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 1.6 (Terminology) for a definition of psi.

appropriate instruments to measure paranormal phenomena will probably evolve as our understanding of the phenomena evolves. ... Until we reach that stage, it is important that we include a liberal sprinkling of anecdotes and accounts by credible individuals of their anomalous experiences. These experiences are like Franklin and his kite. They demonstrate that a phenomenon is there, and that it has certain general characteristics. It is the first step in developing a scientific understanding. (Swanson, 2003, p.7)

There are some religious devotees who claim that miracles can never be explained scientifically and that it is inappropriate and dangerous to investigate demonic forces, but in my opinion, both claims are probably untrue and should not be allowed to hamper scientific investigation. I believe that the claim that reports of human levitation are untrue because they defy common sense and contradict the laws of physics is unreasonable because common sense is historically and culturally dependent, and science clearly does not know everything there is to learn about physics or human consciousness. I support Heath's (2003) assertion that "the argument that levitation can't exist because gravity says so is completely specious" (p.18). I regard reported scientific anomalies like levitation as invitations to research the apparent gaps in our understanding of reality. The parapsychologist Dr Dean Radin explains that

when the evidence for an anomaly becomes overwhelming, and the anomaly cannot be easily accommodated by the existing scientific worldview, this is a very important sign that either our assumptions about reality are wrong or our assumptions about how we come to understand things are wrong. (Radin, 1997, p.250)

Linking science and common sense, the physicist Michio Kaku writes:

If all our common-sense notions about the universe were correct, then science would have solved the secrets of the universe thousands of years ago. The purpose of science is to peel back the layers of the appearance of objects to reveal their underlying nature. In fact, if appearance and essence were the same thing, there would be no need for science. (Kaku, 1994, p.vii)

Psychologist Hans Eysenck and parapsychologist Carl Sargent (1993) explain that "parapsychology is a science whose findings have implications for everyone. Those implications are practical ... and may one day profoundly change the way in which we think of ourselves and our lives" (p.186). While discussing the future of science and psi they noted that

science often handles true innovation very badly. ... At heart, science is all too often a deeply conservative process. The suggestion that scientists are simply being cautious, wisely reluctant to accept new

evidence prematurely, fails to explain the irrational emotion displayed by many scientists when faced with evidence of genuine anomalies. (Eysenck & Sargent, 1993, p.175)

Similarly, Broughton claims that

the prevailing scientific view will not give in easily to a challenger, and the battle is waged not only with data and reasoned debate but also with ridicule and scorn, censorship and denial, and just about every other rhetorical and political tactic. (Broughton, 1991, p.77)

Speaking about "the metaphysics of science, that branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of reality," Radin (1997, p.249) points out that

most of the fundamental assumptions underlying classical science have been severely challenged in recent years. As the old assumptions dissolve because of advancements in many disciplines, new assumptions are carrying us towards a conception of the world that is entirely compatible with psi. Few scientists have paid close attention to this dramatic shift in scientific fundamentals, and the general public has heard almost nothing about it. (Radin, 1997, p.249)

Many paranormal experiences, such as telepathy or out-of-body experiences, cannot be witnessed by others, whereas levitation, if it occurs, would be clearly visible and unambiguous even though many explanations for it involve invisible spiritual forces. To emphasise this point, Willis Harman (1980) writes that psi research

lies midway between and links the objective world of public observation, the domain of 'ordinary' science, and the 'private' world of subjective experience. The phenomena of psychic research are anomalous — their occurrence is widely attested to, yet they do not 'fit in'. Still they speak clearly to the point that something is fundamentally incomplete about a world view which cannot accommodate them. They also serve as a sort of reality test for the universe of inner experience. They are not wholly inner — they are characterised by something being publicly observable. Neither are they wholly outer, since some activity of the mind is clearly involved. (Harman, 1980, p.240)

Radin makes a similar observation when he writes that parapsychology straddles the edge separating the mind-oriented disciplines such as clinical and transpersonal psychology and the matter-oriented disciplines such as neuroscience and cognitive sciences. Parapsychology explicitly studies the interactions between consciousness and the physical world. ... and it assumes that scientific methods can be used to study this realm in a rigorous way. (Radin, 1997, p.263)

Levitation is often regarded as the product of inner spiritual experiences, which illustrates Harman's point, yet researchers studying religions often ignore psi or miraculous phenomena. Religious historian Jess Hollenback (1996) writes that

most major studies of mysticism "do not pay sufficient attention to the supernormal or 'miraculous' phenomena that so frequently accompany mystical states of consciousness" (p.17). Hollenback questions the link between mystical states of consciousness and psi events:

Is it possible that the closer study of these supernormal accompaniments of mystical experience might bring forth data that challenges the validity of psychologism, the view that everything in a mystical state of consciousness originates from within the mystic's own mind? (Hollenback, 1996, p.20)

Following Hollenback's observations, and given that there exist numerous reports of levitating mystics from most major religions, my personal belief is that human levitation is a genuine and neglected, rather than illusory, phenomenon that warrants serious investigation.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

Human levitation has often been regarded as a religious or miraculous phenomenon, but a wider examination reveals that the main groups that have traditionally produced levitation reports are:

1. shamans
2. people supposedly possessed by demonic spiritual entities
3. those subjected to poltergeist activity
4. spirit mediums (Spiritualism)
5. people who believe that they have been abducted by aliens (abductees)
6. practitioners of Eastern martial arts traditions such as qigong (sometimes spelt qi gong, qi kung or ch'i kung)
7. mystics from all major religions

A research project's methodology depends on what is being investigated and why. I do not consider it relevant, nor is it feasible, for this study to document the history, beliefs and current dynamics of the groups that have produced levitation reports. Instead, this project follows the thread of human levitation that appears in each of them. The empirical study of human levitation clearly falls within the domain of parapsychological research. As we have seen, Irwin (2004) contends that parapsychology research concentrates on three central issues, "authenticity, underlying processes, and phenomenology" (p.7). Although he does not specifically discuss the subject, Irwin's three issues can be adopted for the study of human levitation, asking about its authenticity, how it works and what the experience of



levitation is like. The main thrust of this research will focus on Irwin's second parapsychological issue, which he describes as "*process-oriented* research ... designed to ascertain the processes by which parapsychological experiences are enacted" (p.8). Irwin (2004) further claims that, "like other behavioural scientists parapsychologists seek to understand the bases of human experience" (p.8). This leads to his third issue, phenomenology, which "focuses on the description of parapsychological phenomena from the *experient's* point of view; that is, investigators seek to establish the characteristics of the phenomena as actually experienced and the impact such experiences have upon the individual" (p.8). Irwin asserts that "phenomenological research should set the research agenda in parapsychology, because it has the function of specifying the essential characteristics of the phenomenon to be explained" (p.9). His justification for this claim is that

although it certainly is possible to study phenomenological characteristics of the experiences without the slightest concern for underlying processes, such study often does suggest ideas about the nature of underlying processes. In other words, phenomenological research is useful in generating hypotheses for investigation in process-oriented research. (Irwin, 2004, p.8)

Historically there have been several examples of researchers regarding the collecting of anecdotal paranormal experiences as a suitable basis for further research. For example, parapsychologist Dr Pamela Heath (2003) adopts a phenomenological approach by interviewing eight people who claim to have experienced PK, in order to learn more about the phenomenon. Irwin (2004) reports that early Society for Psychical Research investigators not only regarded spontaneous case collections "as a means of ascertaining the authenticity of parapsychological phenomena" (p.31), but

through content analysis of cases researchers hoped to define, for example, the circumstances under which each different type of parapsychological experience occurred and thereby to gain some insight into the ways in which the supposed paranormal processes could operate. (Irwin, 2004, p.31)

Similarly, in the 1950s the American parapsychologist Louisa Rhine collected a large number of uninvestigated extrasensory perception (ESP) reports because she believed that any trends revealed by content analysis "could indicate the nature of the processes underlying parapsychological experiences" (in Irwin, 2004, p.31). A similar interest in anecdotal psi reports is displayed by parapsychology researchers

Dr Edward Kelly and Dr Ralph Locke (1981) while discussing the suggested link between altered states of consciousness and psi. They write that

the literatures that we will draw upon are extremely heterogeneous in scientific value, each presenting special preoccupations, peculiarities and problems to the modern investigator. Nonetheless, we believe that collectively they represent an enormous treasure house of reported human experiences related to the characteristics and conditions of occurrence of apparent psi events. (Kelly & Locke, 1981, p.5)

As these researchers acknowledge, the large number of anecdotal reports of anomalous or psi events from throughout history comprise the raw data that parapsychologists need to trawl through to create hypotheses and research methodologies for their laboratory work. The clarity and reliability of these reports are obviously problematic, but, without their existence, parapsychology as a science would probably not even exist. In this vein, Kelly and Locke describe their survey as

primarily a hypothesis-generating exercise, an effort of discovery rather than one of proof. For this purpose, we propose — and request the reader — to adopt an attitude of “willing suspension of disbelief” towards various claims that psi has occurred and to emphasise instead the *circumstances under which it is believed to have occurred*. (Kelly & Locke, 1981, p.6)

A preliminary reading of both historical and current levitation reports reveals that the majority describe spontaneous rather than deliberate or recurrent events. The typical levitator was not expecting it to occur and may have no coherent explanation as to why it happened at that particular place and time. The levitator may have carried out the same activity that preceded the levitation, such as a meditation or séance, on several other occasions without experiencing levitation. While discussing spontaneous psi events, Joseph H. Rush (1986) writes that

obviously an investigator's chance of being present when a non-recurrent psi incident occurs is nearly zero. The first approach to the investigation of a rare phenomenon is to collect reports by persons who have witnessed or experienced such a phenomenon and try to interpret them. Practically all investigations of non-recurrent spontaneous psi events ... have been done by means of such case collections. (Rush, 1986, p.48)

Rush continues by pointing out that

the advantages of spontaneous case reports as material for psi research are limited but important. They reflect the involvement of psi in everyday life, in a great variety of situations and subjective modes. To the extent that they are valid accounts, they provide the investigator [with] a sampling of the natural range of psi phenomena without the

restrictions on their variety or their physical and psychosocial contexts that experimental procedures necessarily impose. (Rush, 1986, p.48)

Rush, however, does acknowledge that "The evidential status of spontaneous psi experiences is ambivalent" (p.50), although he adds that the reports may be sufficiently convincing to persuade researchers to conduct further investigations into such matters. Heath (2003), too, asserts that "non-experimental research is valuable in documenting the richness and variety of spontaneous psi, as well as giving us a general sense of what factors and themes are associated with PK" (p.107). Although he acknowledges the importance of laboratory research into psi phenomena, Dr Raynor Johnson (1953/1971) asserts that

the continuous accumulation of records of spontaneous phenomena is, however, still of great importance. There are some fields of psychical research into which the experimental method has not yet penetrated: apparitions, hauntings, poltergeist phenomena, levitations, etc. Here the only available method of progress at present is through the collection of well-attested data with as much detail of conditions as possible. (Johnson, 1953/1971, p.130)

While reviewing the possible relationship between psi phenomena and the future evolution of the human race, Michael Murphy (1992) suggests that one reason why "no scientific studies have recorded instances of levitation" (p.536) is that

levitation may only occur during rare and spontaneous ecstasies that cannot be programmed to meet the requirements of a scientific experiment. Superordinary lifting from the ground, if it in fact occurs, would require an improbable set of circumstances, which a scientist would be lucky to witness. Levitation, like other holy powers, would have to be caught "in the wild". (Murphy, 1992, p.536)

During my study I have not come in contact with anyone who is able to levitate at will. Murphy seems to support the suggestion that an appropriate technique for investigating human levitation is to concentrate on gathering information from whatever sources are available 'in the wild' rather than within a laboratory.

Writing about his research into reports of alien abductions, or 'encounters' as he prefers to term them, Harvard professor of psychiatry, Dr John Mack (2000a), discusses the methodological problems with studying such reports. While claiming that "all knowledge of reality starts with experience" (p.22), Mack writes that, "Perhaps it is characteristic of certain anomalies that they refuse to locate themselves in any of our established disciplines, thus forcing us to use a multidisciplinary approach or requiring the creation of a new discipline altogether" (p.23). Mack adopts a largely phenomenological approach in his research. Apart

from checking that they are not suffering from any known mental illnesses, he does not attempt to verify his interviewees' alien encounter reports because it would be almost impossible to do so. Mack's methodology involves providing detailed alien encounter case studies combined with a thematic comparison of reports from several other interviewees. As he writes:

What appears to yield the best results, as measured by a steady emergence of information or knowledge, falling short of conventional demands for proof, is a combination of meticulous empirical observation together with carefully recorded narratives of first hand experiences, matching, sorting, and comparing accounts from many individuals from different locations and cultures. (Mack, 2000a, p.10)

While analysing the debate about laboratory versus field-based methodologies in parapsychology research, philosopher Professor Stephen Braude (1986) points out that he "cannot support the prevailing view that the non-experimental evidence of parapsychology is either inherently weak or at least inferior to the laboratory evidence" (p.3). He claims that such evidence "has been unjustly maligned" and could instead be seen as "an extremely valuable source of information concerning the nature and limits, and even the reality, of psi functioning" (1986, p.3). Braude (1986) concludes that "non-experimental evidence may be our single best source of information about psi, at least in its most customary form" (p.10), and that "parapsychology would be in a sorry state indeed if the experimental evidence were the only evidence available" (p.11).

Although these opinions about research methodologies derive from a range of disciplines, the central point is that a thematic comparison of anecdotal levitation reports and of the seven groups that traditionally produce them, combined with a hypothesis generating exercise about how the phenomenon might work (including practical recommendations for further research), appears to be the most appropriate qualitative methodology with which to conduct an investigation into the rare and largely spontaneous psi phenomenon of human levitation. In her study of near-death experience reports, Carol Zaleski (1987) takes a similar approach, writing that "Comparative study will highlight features that are not otherwise obvious, putting into sharper relief the elements that are culturally specific and at the same time drawing attention to perennial aspects" (p.6). By mirroring two of the basic concerns of parapsychology (underlying process and phenomenology) this approach is designed to help persuade more empirical researchers that the

available data about human levitation is sufficiently interesting to warrant further scientific investigation.

### **1.5 Information sources**

This study combines information from several overlapping sources:

- 1)** I have reviewed numerous levitation reports from the literature of shamanism, mysticism, Spiritualism, spirit possession, poltergeist activity, ufology (UFOs and alien abductions), martial arts traditions such as qigong and some miscellaneous groups. What I have looked for are physical and personal descriptions of levitation events as well as descriptions of the cultural settings in which they occurred.
- 2)** I have interviewed six people who claim to have levitated, and received e-mail and phone reports from two others who claim to have levitated, and two who said they almost levitated while participating in the lifting game or Transcendental Meditation. All of these people fit into one or more of the seven groups that traditionally produce levitation reports.
- 3)** I have interviewed a sample of Spiritualists, Christian priests and pastors (Catholics and Anglicans) and qigong instructors<sup>1</sup> to ascertain their opinions about miraculous or psi events such as human levitation. Although very few of them claim to have levitated or to have seen someone else do it, their beliefs are important because they represent the particular spiritual and cultural environment surrounding levitators or potential levitators within these groups.

It has not been possible to conduct interviews with representatives of all the groups that have traditionally produced levitation reports. Instead of interviewing samples of indigenous shamans and mystics from around the world, I have used levitation reports from anthropological, religious and paranormal literature. For ethical and availability reasons, I have been unable to interview people who are or have been spiritually possessed or have suffered from poltergeist activity. These people are rare indeed and may not be able to provide informed consent to be interviewed.

I have referred to shamans, mystics, Spiritualists, possessed people, those suffering from poltergeist activity, alien abductees and qigong practitioners as belonging to particular 'groups', but this word is being used merely for convenience. Members of

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for a list of interviewees.

these so-called groups may vary significantly in their beliefs and behaviour. For example, while the Spiritualists who I have interviewed mostly live in Western Australia, they come from a variety of Spiritualist churches (see Cartwright, 2003), and some of the interviewed qigong instructors also teach yoga and other traditions.

## **1.6 Terminology**

**1)** Several of the older texts quoted in this thesis — eg: Leroy (1928) and Eliade (1951/1989) — do not follow the modern convention of avoiding sexist terminology. For example, they may use the word 'man' rather than 'humanity', or 'he' rather than 'he or she'. I am conscious of this deficiency and intend no offence when I use quotations that contain these terms.

**2)** Psi: In 1942 the word 'psi' (the twenty-third letter of the Greek alphabet) was proposed by the British psychologist R.H. Thouless as a generic term for ESP and PK phenomena (Beloff, 1993, p.141) and is now widely used by parapsychologists.

**3)** Abbreviations used in this thesis are:

ASC (altered state of consciousness)

ESP (extrasensory perception)

ET (extraterrestrial)

NDE (near-death experience)

OBE (out-of-body experience)

PK (psychokinesis)

UFO (unidentified flying object)

## **1.7 Outline of Chapters**

Because the main thrust of this research is to carry out a thematic comparison of the seven groups that traditionally produce human levitation reports, each of the next five chapters documents a particular theme that exists in all or most of the groups. Chapter 2 demonstrates that most of the groups believe in a spirit realm inhabited by entities or powers that can cause psi events. Chapter 3 reveals that, to varying extents and either voluntarily or involuntarily, most groups include members who experience some form of spirit possession. Chapter 4 discusses the extent to which some group members use breathing exercises or other techniques to enter altered states of consciousness, which seem to correlate with psi events. Chapter 5

shows that within the seven groups there are people, including some levitators, who have a range of other psi abilities. No attempt is made to prove that the reports of these other paranormal abilities are true, but their similarities are noted. Chapter 6 reveals that, in addition to various research obstacles, traditional and modern taboos against developing and demonstrating psi abilities exist in most of the groups. Chapter 7 discusses some miscellaneous groups or activities that have produced some levitation reports and which share several themes with the main groups. Chapter 8 summarises the thematic comparison results, discusses some theories produced by the hypothesis-generation component of this project and makes some suggestions for further research into human levitation.

## Chapter 2

## Spirits and Spirit Realms

The most obvious similarity between the seven groups that have traditionally produced human levitation reports is that, to varying degrees, they believe in the existence of spirits, divine beings, or invisible entities that inhabit one or more spiritual or other-dimensional realms. People supposedly possessed by malevolent spirits or suffering from poltergeist activity may not have previously believed in spirits, but those around them frequently conclude that spirits are involved.

Although their definitions of spirits or otherworld entities may vary — for example, they may be spirits of the dead, cosmic beings, demigods, or emissaries of an all-pervasive spiritual force — this chapter documents these groups' beliefs about spirits and spirit realms, paying attention to whether they attribute psi events such as human levitation to these entities. Where possible, examples of human levitation from each group are described including the levitator's beliefs about the event. While there may at times be differences between the beliefs of a particular group and those of a member who has levitated, I am assuming that in most cases the group's beliefs influence any reactions to such an event.

Documenting beliefs about spirits and the realms they inhabit is not an attempt to prove that they exist or that they levitate people, although these possibilities are not dismissed. Evidence that spirits exist would not prove that they are responsible for psi events. Attributing human levitation to invisible entities is understandable if members of a group already believe in them and have no other explanation for the event. Since spirits are generally invisible, the problem with such an explanation is that it is virtually impossible to prove or disprove their existence, let alone their capacity to levitate people.

In discussing these groups and their beliefs, I acknowledge that there may be a difference in outlook between group members and researchers; for example, most of the available information on shamanism is written by anthropologists — who may be sceptical of psi abilities — rather than by shamans, for whom it is part of their worldview. Similarly, some ufologists also claim to be alien abductees, and this might undermine their objectivity in the eyes of their colleagues. In most religions some participants have dogmatic beliefs while researchers are generally more open-minded. Poltergeist investigators, for example, may be prepared to alter their



theories in the light of new research, whereas a Spiritualist might not be prepared to do so. On the other hand, many academics deny the existence of psi abilities while many group members believe in them. In discussing these groups I will be quoting a mixture of religious and secular opinions about spirits, spirit realms and psi abilities.

## **2.1 Shamanism**

Mircea Eliade (1951/1989) writes that "the experience of height and ascent, and even of levitation ... can be regarded as a typical feature of shamanic techniques in general" (p.61). He tells us that in Tungus séances, "The shaman becomes 'light' and can spring into the air with a costume that may weigh as much as sixty-five pounds [29.5 kg], yet the patient scarcely feels the shaman tread on his body" (p.243), although it is unclear whether this refers to mass control, levitation or both.

As anthropologist Michael Harner explains, a belief in spirits and spirit realms lies at the heart of shamanism.

To perform his work, the shaman depends on special, personal power, which is usually supplied by his guardian and helping spirits. Each shaman generally has at least one guardian spirit in his service, whether or not he also possesses helping spirits. (Harner, 1990, p.42)

The animistic perspective which permeates shamanism assumes that the world abounds with spirits and that appeasing some of them can bring positive benefits to oneself and others. Nevill Drury asserts that

shamanism is really applied animism, or animism in practice. Because nature is alive with gods and spirits, and because all aspects of the cosmos are perceived as interconnected ... the shaman is required as an intermediary between the different planes of being. (Drury, 1996, p.10)

Shamans can be seen as power-brokers between this world and the spirit realms in which they believe. Having learnt to enter these realms during their initiation experiences, shamans develop the ability to move between these worlds at will. They normally do this while in a state of ecstasy or altered state of consciousness (ASC), which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. Shamans may recruit spirits to assist them in their healing work, which is generally considered their most important activity. This illustrates that one of the fundamental beliefs of shamanism is that spirits can make psi or magical events happen in this world. Eliade (1951/1989) reports that shamans believe that "the universe in general is

conceived as having three levels — sky, earth, underworld — connected by a central axis" (p.259), and that these

three great cosmic regions ... can be successively traversed because they are linked together by a central axis. This axis, of course, passes through an 'opening', a 'hole'; it is through this hole that the gods descend to earth and the dead to the subterranean regions; it is through the same hole that the soul of the shaman in ecstasy can fly up or down in the course of his celestial or infernal journeys. (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.259)

Anthropologist Piers Vitebsky explains why shamans learn to access these realms.

The shaman's activity is based on ideas of space, and although the everyday world is permeated by spirits there are also other, separate realms to which shamans must travel. If one assumes that spirits exist, and that they exist in a different realm from ours and reach out to affect our health and food supply, then it follows that when these things are disrupted someone must travel into the realm of the spirits to persuade them to behave differently. (Vitebsky, 1995, p.15)

Vitebsky also points out that in shamanism everything may be seen as "imbued with spirit" or that the term spirit "sometimes seems better translated as the 'essence' of a phenomenon," or spirits may be regarded "as having their own existence" (p.12). Ethnologist Holger Kalweit (1992) notes that in many tribal societies terms to describe the concept of universal energy can "refer to God, to being as a whole, and equally to the helping spirits who aid shamans into other zones of consciousness or in healing" (p.229).

Although human levitation is not an important or well-documented event in shamanism, it can often be rather confusing as to whether descriptions of shamans flying are referring to spirit flight, levitation or both. In a section entitled "Magical Flight," Eliade (1951/1989, p.477) points out that "all over the world the same magical power is credited to sorcerers and medicine men". He emphasises that

the point of primary importance here is that the mythology and the rites of magical flight peculiar to shamans and sorcerers confirm and proclaim their transcendence in respect to the human condition; by flying into the air, in bird form or in their normal human shape, shamans as it were proclaim the degeneration of humanity. For as we have seen, a number of myths refer to a primordial time when *all human beings* could ascend to heaven, by climbing a mountain, a tree, or a ladder, or by flying by their own power, or being carried by birds. (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.480)

It may seem uncertain whether Eliade's use of the term 'magical flight' refers to the flight of the shaman's soul, physical levitation, or both, but he clarifies the matter by noting that

a universal belief, amply documented in Europe, gives wizards and witches the ability to fly through the air. We have seen that the same magical powers are credited to yogins, fakirs, and alchemists. We should make it clear, however, that here such powers often take on a purely spiritual character. (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.478)

Later he reminds us that "the levitation of saints and magicians is also attested in both the Christian and Islamic traditions" (p.481) and quotes the "outstanding example" of St Joseph of Cupertino (p.482). Eliade appears to be allowing for the possibility of human levitation while emphasising that, more often than not, shamans leave their physical bodies behind when they fly to spirit realms.

The ambiguity of the term 'spirit flight' occurs elsewhere. Knud Rasmussen (1931/1976) provides the following story from an Eskimo shaman called Samik:

My grandfather was from Netsilik Land; he was very fond of going out on spirit flights, and once when he was out there he met another great shaman from Utkuhikjalik, a man named Muraoq, who was also out on a spirit flight. They met far out over the sea ice, about midway between their villages. When the two met, Muraoq spread out his arms like a bird gliding on its wings, but he was incautious and came so close to Titqatsaq that they collided in the air; they crashed together so violently that Titqatsaq fell down on the ice. He lay there without being able to move until Muraoq turned back and got his helping spirit to help him up again. Scarcely had Titqatsaq got up into the air again when he returned the compliment and crashed against Muraoq, so that he, too, dropped on the ice. At first he thought of leaving him without helping him up; but then he recalled how often Muraoq had been good to him; that was why he took pity on him and helped him up in exactly the same way as he himself had been helped up; and when they got home they told the people at their villages all that had happened. (Rasmussen, 1931/1976, p.299)

While the term 'spirit flight' in Rasmussen's report could refer to the flight of a shaman's spirit, in this instance I believe it means physical levitation. Rasmussen's report includes a drawing of one shaman standing on the ground waving to the other who is flying above him (in Halifax, 1982, p.24). Joan Halifax's description of this incident suggests that the shamans were amusing themselves by levitating: "In ascents to the celestial regions, the shaman attempts to turn into a bird and fly. ... The shaman may attempt such flights for the good of the community or out of pleasure" (Halifax, 1982, p.23). When Titqatsaq fell onto the ice, Muraoq "got his helping spirit to help him up again," implying that a shaman's helping spirit can facilitate levitation. The physical nature of these shamans' spirit flight is emphasised both by the fact that the collisions took place at a specific geographical

location and that they caused each shaman to fall onto the sea ice. It seems unlikely that two shamans flying in an out-of-body state would collide and fall down.

As mentioned earlier, this research seeks to demonstrate that shamans and other levitators attribute their psi feats to spiritual entities. Richard Noll (1987) states that shamans are 'masters of spirits'. "Spirits are employed to effect changes in the shaman himself or in others (as in healing), or to make changes in or receive information about the outer physical world" (p.49). Vitebsky (1995, p.66) explains that "Shamans cannot function unaided and are dependent for their achievements on helpers, so that their feats are not so much superhuman as super-assisted". Similarly, Drury (1996, p.42) claims that "spirit guides are perceived as crucial to the shaman's resolve and power: a literal embodiment of psychic and magical strength". Vitebsky (1995) notes that a wide range of spirit helpers exist, such as ancestors, warrior spirits, previous shamans, or animals, and that "tools and weapons may have their own spirits". Spirit helpers may warn the shaman about future obstacles or dangers and "often they provide the shaman with magical abilities or strengths which correspond to their own properties" (p.66). Animal spirits may provide the shaman with useful abilities that are not available to other humans. For example, "A jaguar spirit will make a shaman strong and fierce. ... Bird and fish spirits enable a shaman to move freely through air and water" (Vitebsky, 1995, p.67). This demonstrates that shamans believe not only in spirit realms, but also that their inhabitants can facilitate psi events.

## **2.2 Poltergeist Activity**

At times it may be difficult to distinguish poltergeist activity from spirit possession because both appear to be involuntary and may involve objects and people being thrown around. The most obvious difference is that in spirit possession the person is clearly not behaving normally whereas in poltergeist activity it may not be obvious that anyone is the epicentre of the activity. Cases of poltergeist activity are infrequent and may be poorly documented, sometimes because those involved have no idea what is happening. The 1977 Enfield poltergeist outbreak in England is one of the best documented cases in modern times because one of the primary investigators, Guy Playfair (1980), wrote a book about it<sup>1</sup>. There were four children in the family concerned, but the activity appeared to concentrate on eleven-year-old

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the recordings and photographs taken during the Enfield poltergeist outbreak can be found under 'Poltergeist' at <http://www.zurichmansion.org>

Janet. Many of the strange and frightening things that happened in the house were witnessed, photographed or tape-recorded by investigators (Enfield, 2004). An invisible force hurled Janet out of bed on at least fifty occasions (Playfair, 1980, p.105). One photograph shows her in mid-air as she flies across the room (p.129). Another time, before several witnesses, Janet was thrown from her chair for about two and a half metres (Playfair, 1980, p.89). Researchers eventually found that the spirit(s) that seemed to be causing the events could reply out loud when questioned (Playfair, 1980, p.132; Wilson, 1981, p.241), so they termed it, or them, the 'Voice'. On one occasion, an investigator, David Robertson, challenged the Voice to levitate Janet. The Voice would not permit the investigators to witness the event, but from outside the bedroom Janet was heard being bounced up and down on the bed. She said that she had levitated and also floated through the wall into the neighbouring house. The Voice declined to repeat the event, but a book (ironically called *Fun and Games for Children*) that had been in Janet's bedroom a few minutes earlier was found on the floor next door (Playfair, 1980, p.153; Wilson, 1981, p.243). A neighbour walking by outside testified that, when looking at Janet's window, she had seen "books and cushions striking the window, and Janet rising into the air — in a horizontal position — and descending again, as if being bounced on a trampoline" (Wilson, 1981, p.244). To test for fraud, the researchers tried bouncing on Janet's bed to see if they could replicate this feat, but were unable to do so.

Household objects may be seen to move through the air, or materialise in mid-air, during poltergeist activity. Sometimes they even appear to move through walls or the ceiling. In their analysis of five hundred poltergeist reports, British parapsychologists Alan Gauld and Tony Cornell (1979, p.227) found that thirty-three cases (6.6%) involved levitation of the human body, although it appears that in most of them the person is thrown through the air rather than hovering in one place. Guiley (1991) defines a poltergeist as "a spirit, usually mischievous and sometimes malevolent, which manifests by making noises, moving objects, and assaulting people and animals" (p.455). She explains that the word 'poltergeist' comes from the German word *poltern* meaning 'to knock' and *geist* meaning 'spirit'. Cassirer (1988, p.51) claims that the correct meaning of the word is "boisterous spirit". Whichever translation one favours, both reveal that poltergeist activity was traditionally thought to be caused by invisible spirits. Early last century, researchers such as the psychoanalyst Nandor Fodor (1933/1966) started to suspect that a

more complex explanation was required. Having initially defined poltergeists as "noisy spirits, causing periodic psychic disturbances of a malicious character in certain places in the presence of a certain mostly unsuspecting sensitive person" (p.291), Fodor (1958) writes that, "It has taken me many years to arrive at the conclusion that the poltergeist disturbance may represent an episodic mental aberration ... arising from a severe traumatisation and consequent dissociation" (p.7). Similarly, Loyd Auerbach claims that

as models for psychic functioning in the living came into better focus (especially ideas of mind influencing matter) parapsychologists were better able to understand just what was happening. The concept of the poltergeist as somehow related to a human agent ... came into being, and currently this is the main model that we work with. (Auerbach, 1986, p.34)

Cassirer (1988) explains that an alternative term for poltergeist activity, Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis (RSPK), "suggests that all such cases are (a) 'person-centred', and (b) explicable in terms of human energies. In other words, the underlying idea is that of an unconsciously-acting medium or 'epicentre'" (p.51). Radin (1997) defines poltergeists as "large-scale psychokinetic phenomena previously attributed to spirits but now associated with a living person, frequently an adolescent" (p.15). However, as Irwin (1994, p.201) notes, although there is some experimental evidence to support the idea that RSPK may be "due to the subconscious release of PK as a release from considerable psychological tension," the theory has by no means been proven. Colin Wilson (1994) has been "converted from the notion that poltergeists are simply a form of 'spontaneous psychokinesis', due to the hidden power of the unconscious mind, to the conviction that they are independent spirits" (p.552). To explain, he quotes a conversation with Playfair, who combines the noisy spirits and psychic projection theories, referring to the resulting hybrid as a "football of energy":

When people get into conditions of tension, they exude a kind of energy — the kind of thing that happens to teenagers at puberty. Along come a couple of spirits, and they do what any group of schoolboys would do — they begin to kick it around, smashing windows and generally creating havoc. Then they get tired and leave it. In fact the football often explodes, and turns into a puddle of water. (in Wilson, 1994, p.554)

Playfair acknowledges that RSPK may operate at times: "I'm not saying there's not such a thing as spontaneous psychokinesis. But most poltergeists are spirits" (in Wilson, 1994, p.555). It is not part of this research to attempt to validate the RSPK

theory as opposed to the noisy spirits theory. The fact that both theories are still on the table reflects the complexity of attempting to explain human levitation, because they apply equally to that phenomenon as well. Some people claim to have been levitated by spirits, while others appear able to levitate themselves using PK. However, claiming that a psi event is the product of PK fails to explain how it works, or whether the energy involved is internally or externally generated, or some other alternative for which we at present have no accepted scientific concept.

Irwin (2004) provides several reasons to suspect that some sort of intelligence may be behind many poltergeist cases. Investigators can at times communicate with whatever seems to be causing the poltergeist chaos. Apparitions are sometimes seen; objects may move through the air as if they are being carried; the activity is sometimes directed at only one person; and sometimes "exorcism may be successful in attenuating the disturbance" (p.158). Gault and Cornell (1979, p.227) found that "communication through phenomena" occurred in 16% of the cases they reviewed; supposedly deceased persons communicated in 9% of the cases; and in an additional 2% of cases the communication came from some other type of entity. This does not prove that spirits cause poltergeist activity because these events could be projections from a living person's unconscious mind. Obviously more research is needed. Claiming that poltergeist activity is caused by noisy spirits or unconscious PK could be seen as replacing one mystery with another, although PK is currently being researched by some parapsychologists. On the other hand, many scientists are sceptical about the reality of spirits, or they lack a suitable methodology with which to investigate them. Irwin cleverly sums up the matter: "Conceptually the poltergeist is subject to the zeitgeist" (2004, p.161).

### **2.3 Spiritualism**

Fodor (1933/1966) claims that "There are two basic facts in spiritualism: the continuity of personality and the powers of communication after death" (p.360). In 1848 the Fox sisters, Maggie and Katie, from Hydesville, New York, started to demonstrate their ability to communicate with spirits. Because of the unprecedented public interest in the phenomenon, the girls' older sister, Leah, turned them into a stage act and at their séances they began to communicate with the spirits of famous people. The movement soon expanded across America and to Europe. Spiritualism may only have started in the last two hundred years but, as parapsychologist John Beloff (1993) notes, archaeological evidence suggests that a

belief in an afterlife has existed for thousands of years and it is still a fundamental tenet of all major religions. Although the practice of communicating with the dead has been at the heart of shamanism for thousands of years, "all three of the great monotheistic religions frowned upon such practices, and none so more than the Christian Church" (Beloff, 1993, p.38). Spiritualism, however, encourages such communication. Based in Manchester, England, the Spiritualists National Union (SNU) is one of the two largest Spiritualists organizations in the world. It

affirms that man's spirit survives physical death and enters a Spirit world which surrounds and interpenetrates our material life. It asserts that the truth of this statement can be demonstrated under the right conditions when communication can and does take place between the worlds of spirit and earthly beings. This communication is only possible through individuals who have what is known as mediumistic abilities and who are known as mediums. (Meynell, 1998, para.6)

Spirit mediums fall into two categories, mental or physical. A mental medium communicates with spirits using ESP and it is this type of mediumship that is demonstrated most often in public. Physical mediumship is rarer, more dramatic, and "is characterised by levitations, rappings, apports, telekinesis of objects, psychic lights, music and smells, and other activities" (Guiley, 1991, p.571).

Allan Kardec, whose real name was Hypolyte [or Hyppolite] Rivail (1803-1869), was a French doctor and author of *The Spirits' Book* (1856/1989). Kardec accumulated a wealth of information about spirits through various mediums. Although the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' are sometimes used interchangeably in Western society today, Kardec (1856/1989) defines them differently. 'Soul' is the "immaterial and individual being which resides in us, and survives the body" (p.23), while spirits or genii are the beings that communicate with us through mediums (p.31). Kardec uses quotations from various spirits to clarify this distinction:

The spirit-world is the normal, primitive, eternal world, pre-existent to, and surviving, everything else. ... Spirits temporarily assume a perishable material envelope, the destruction of which by death, restores them to liberty. ... The soul is an incarnated spirit, whose body is only its envelope. ... A spirit, therefore, is not an abstract, undefined being, only to be conceived of by our thought; it is a real, circumscribed being. (Kardec, 1856/1989, p.32)

To explain the psi events that occur in the presence of physical mediums, Kardec claims that spirits

are everywhere, in space, and around us, seeing us, and mixing with us incessantly. ... They act both upon matter and upon thought, and constitute one of the powers of nature, the efficient cause of many



classes of phenomena hitherto unexplained or misinterpreted. (Kardec, 1856/1989, p.34)

Beloff (1993, p.40) distinguishes between the life-after-death argument that Spiritualists espouse and the psi phenomena that occur at séances. Empirically it is easier to research a medium's PK abilities than it is to conclude that purported messages from the dead constitute proof of survival. Nevertheless, as Braude (1986) writes, although "physical mediumship is only one source of evidence for large-scale PK," he believes that "It is simply the best, as far as the quality and amount of documentation is concerned" (p.169).

Victorian séances were often conducted in darkness or semi-darkness because it was believed that spirits preferred it, and because it was easier to see the anomalous luminous phenomena that sometimes appeared (Braude, 1986, p.73). Some early researchers into Spiritualism, such as Sir William Crookes, were not entirely convinced that spirits were responsible and proposed the existence of a 'psychic force' (in Beloff, 1993, p.51). Others were convinced that all spirit mediums were cheating, and some fraudulent mediums were unmasked or voluntarily confessed (eg: Lamar Keene, 1977). While darkness can facilitate all kinds of hoaxes, there were some physical mediums — such as D.D. Home, who often worked in daylight or low lighting — who were never caught cheating or whose psi feats were so extraordinary that fraud seems unlikely.

There are several mediums who have supposedly levitated. Playfair describes the feats of Brazilian medium Carmine Mirabelli, born in 1889. Mirabelli once

levitated into the air while handcuffed, whereupon there was a sound of falling handcuffs as he disappeared altogether, reappearing in his nearby office which was locked from the outside, where startled witnesses burst in to find him stretched out on a chaise longue and chanting away in Latin. (Playfair, 1995, p.7)

Psi events happened around Mirabelli when he was not at a séance. Fodor (1933/1966) reports that he was once seen to levitate "in the street two metres high for three minutes" (p.243). The famous Italian medium, Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918), was also seen levitating several times during séances (Giovetti, 1995, p.28). "The greatest physical medium in the history of modern spiritualism" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.171) was D.D. Home (1833-1886), whose psi exploits — including numerous levitations — are documented in popular books and more

scholarly works (Beloff, 1989; Braude, 1986; Broughton, 1991; Crookes, 1874/1972; Dingwell, 1947/1962; Fodor, 1933/1966; Inglis, 1986; Irwin, 1994), as well as in his autobiography (Home, 1863/1972). As Braude (1986) notes, "during the entire period of Home's mediumship — a period of almost 25 years — he was never detected in fraud of any kind" (p.72). The following report comes from Crookes, who spent a considerable amount of time investigating Spiritualism despite being ridiculed by many of his sceptical colleagues.

The most striking cases of levitation which I have witnessed have been with Mr Home. On three separate occasions have I seen him raised completely from the floor of the room. Once sitting on an easy chair, once kneeling on his chair, and once standing up. On each occasion I had full opportunity of watching the occurrence as it was taking place. (Crookes, 1874/1972, p.89)

Home's autobiography contains several testimonies. One, written by an American séance participant, describes what Home claims is his first levitation.

Suddenly ... Mr Home was taken up into the air! I had hold of his hand at the time, and I and others felt his feet — they were lifted a foot from the floor! ... Again and again he was taken from the floor, and the third time he was carried to the lofty ceiling of the apartment, with which his hand and head came in gentle contact. (in Home, 1863/1972, p.38)

To illustrate his belief that the levitation was facilitated by spirits, the witness adds that "these latter demonstrations were made in response to a request of mine that the spirits would give us something that would satisfy everyone in the room of their presence" (p.39). These examples illustrate that, not only do Spiritualists believe that spirits exist in a realm that interpenetrates physical reality, but that they can cause psi events such as human levitation.

For this research I interviewed several Spiritualists who claim to have either levitated themselves or witnessed someone else do it. Edward<sup>1</sup> is an experienced spirit medium who lived for many years in England and now resides in Western Australia. The first levitation he witnessed was at a small get-together of about six spirit mediums and one "interested person" who was about 18 years old, in a normally lit room. After a while, without anyone attempting to cause it, the "ordinary kitchen chair" with the interested person on it lifted "a good six inches [15 cm] off the ground" for "over a minute". In Edward's opinion, the levitation of the guest was the spirits' way of saying "Look, we're here to assist and to show you what we can do." In Edward's second example he was with a group of people who were trying to

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym. For a list of interviews see Appendix.

levitate someone who "was lying down on a healing couch". At first they were laughing and didn't think they were going to succeed. But then,

we'd all quietened down and you could feel the presence of people that the average person couldn't see. Spirits, yes. And they simply lifted him up, and he was a good foot [30 cm] off the bed ... and kept there for nearly five minutes. Horizontal.

The levitator "was wide awake and quite willing ... because we were talking at the same time. 'What do you feel?' We were asking questions." Edward reports that, not surprisingly, the levitator said that

he felt very light, extremely light. ... He felt tingles all over his body. It wasn't harming him, he just felt this tingling sensation, even in his ears, in his head. His eyes were quite clear, there was no problem at all. So we said 'Okay, fine. Let's let him down.' And it took a while. ... There was not a sudden bump. It was gentle and comfortable.

In Edward's third example, he and some Spiritualist friends decided to levitate a young man in a different way from the previous two occasions. "He was laying on his tummy, on the ground. ... And again it took time. The energies built up ... you could feel them coming up. ... Up this person came. Beautiful." Still face down in the horizontal position, the levitator rose about "three feet" [91 cm] for "between 8, 9, 10 minutes. And they turned him so gently," before lowering him to the ground.

A second interviewee, Maude, once held a senior position in a Perth Spiritualist Church, but is now semi-retired. Her Church has a strong affiliation with Christianity and holds the Bible in high regard. Maude claims to have been levitated several times during her long career as a medium although, instead of using the terms spirit medium and séance, she says that she used to lead an open 'circle' or guided meditation group of about 10 to 15 people. She would verbally guide the participants through a meditative visualisation "up a mountain, at the beach or into a small spiritual imaginative area". She relates that several times at these circles, "I have actually felt myself lifted up and, because I believe in divine protection, I've called for protection and on a couple of occasions I've been brought back down ... other times I've been held in that position". On another occasion, after she had finished talking and the participants were sitting quietly meditating, she found herself being lifted off her chair to a height of "about 30 centimetres" in a normally lit room ("we don't meditate in the dark") for "probably something like 5, 6, [or] 7 minutes". Maude believes both in God and spiritual entities. When asked why some people can see spiritual beings and some cannot, she replies that

I can only say to people, that if you work in the right way you will be able to see them. It's to do with ... the gift of clairvoyance [with] which you can either feel them, hear them speak: all the normal senses can be activated, plus the sixth sense where you can become aware of them. I have heard them, I have seen them, I have felt them.

Several of the Spiritualists interviewed for this research used the term 'spirit' in what appears to be a generic or collective sense. Asked what they meant by this, Elizabeth explains that her

belief is that spirit is energy. ... To me the individual spirits are part of the one God entity, being a massive ball of energy, or that energy we put a name to as 'spirit'. ... The peak of the mountain I see as like a big ball of energy which is God. Perfect essence, perfect spirit. And that then ... sends off other spirits or parts of it to experience things on this Earth plane.

Garry uses the term 'spirit' to refer to either spirits in general, the energy of the spirit realm, or his spirit guides. For example, if something unusual happens to him before he leaves the house, he might conclude that "spirit was probably telling me 'Don't go out today'". Richard explains that "Spirit to me is a basic vibration of human life. ... A spirit would be an individual, as we are individuated humans. ... But the total consciousness of life to me is spirit". In a similar sense, Barbara claims that "God to us is a great spirit". Oliver, too, has a dual interpretation of the word spirit, "I see it in two ways: as an individual and of a spiritual energy power". Fred explains that "We're talking of spirit as a force. The spirit force. ... and that's why we always talk about spirit and not spirits". Fred adds that

We believe that God is a supreme spirit, or a spirit that created everybody. ... Somebody else might call it another name, all the religions have got their own name, but I think that they're all really looking [at] the spirit, or the creator.

So far, the evidence reveals that within shamanism, poltergeist activity and Spiritualism there is a belief in another dimension or realm inhabited by spirits that can facilitate psi events such as levitation. Some members of these groups link psi events to an all-pervasive spiritual force that seems able to operate voluntarily, involuntarily, or unconsciously through the human mind, which suggests a link between consciousness and this spirit realm. This raises the question of whether a belief in spirits is simply a personification of this spiritual force or whether they are two different phenomena.

## 2.4 Alien Abductions

The term 'alien abduction' is commonly used to describe interactions between humans and extraterrestrials, but some abductees claim that what they prefer to call their 'close encounters' with aliens are largely voluntary and that they look forward to repeat encounters. While acknowledging these concerns, I will for convenience continue to use both terms. Research into ufology, which includes close encounters, is a fairly new science. For about the last fifty years UFOs, aliens and more recently alien abductions, have been the subject of ridicule and sensational tabloid journalism, and ufology has not been regarded as a valid subject for academic research. For much of this time the ufology literature consisted largely of poorly referenced books and magazine articles with only a small number of scholarly works. Today there is an increasing amount of serious ufology research being published (eg: Jacobs, 2000), some of which has noted similarities between close encounters and religion, shamanism, Spiritualism, spirit possession and poltergeist activity (eg: Harvey-Wilson, 2000; Mack, 1995, 2000). Some of these links will be discussed in later chapters, while this section will provide examples of abductees levitating, and discuss to what extent ufologists and abductees believe that aliens can be seen as spiritual beings with psi abilities from other-dimensional realms.

Alien abductees are not a coherent group in the same sense as Spiritualists, Christians or shamans. They come from all walks of life and age groups (Rodwell, 1998) and, if they meet at all, it may only be at abduction support groups or UFO conferences. There is no religious literature or tradition from which they draw their beliefs, although many of them have a high regard for the books of sympathetic abduction researchers such as Mack (1995, 2000). Abductees may not have been actively religious or believed in spirits before their abductions, but often have a history of psychic experiences, which might have primed them to accept the existence of invisible entities or to project their spiritual beliefs onto aliens. Many abductees are initially traumatised and bewildered but may become more accepting of their encounters after meeting an abduction counsellor or other experiencers. As discussed in some of my previous research, theories about the origins of UFOs and aliens fall into three main categories (Harvey-Wilson, 2000, p.20).

- 1) The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) which claims that UFOs are extraterrestrial spacecraft from elsewhere within the physical universe. Some researchers

object to this theory because of the prohibitive distances from Earth to any possibly inhabited planets, while others assert that any sufficiently advanced civilisation would have surmounted these problems. Other critics claim that the overall frequency and bizarre psi nature or 'strangeness' of UFO close encounters require a more complex explanation than visiting spaceships.

- 2) The second hypothesis, called variously the Psychosocial Stress, Psychic Projection, or Cosmic Poltergeist Hypothesis, states that UFOs and aliens are some type of archetypal or psychic projection from within either the troubled unconscious minds of individual witnesses, or the collective unconscious of a society that has become psychologically unbalanced — hence the term psychosocial stress. One objection to this theory is that it does not explain supposed UFO landing traces or how some UFOs have been detected by radar.
- 3) The third hypothesis is the Otherworld Hypothesis which suggests that UFOs may well be real or solid in some sense, but that they originate from other dimensions, a parallel universe, or an invisible otherworld inhabited by various spiritual or psi entities that can manifest in this world at will to abduct or interact with witnesses. The hypothesis includes the suggestion that this otherworld is accessible to humans via ASCs. One difficulty with this hypothesis is that an explanation for close encounters that appeals to an invisible, magical, or spiritual realm and ASCs merely replaces one mystery with another.

There are several variations to these three hypotheses, with some researchers discussing all of them impartially, while others strongly advocate one or another. The Otherworld Hypothesis is in one sense just an extension of the Psychosocial Stress Hypothesis in that both involve largely unproven speculation about the depths of the human psyche and ASCs. One could say that both hypotheses result from uncertainty as to whether there really exists something akin to Dr Carl Jung's collective unconscious and if so, what its parameters are. For example, is the collective unconscious each person's private repository of archetypal information, or are all minds somehow connected by a transpersonal but largely unconscious realm — possibly inhabited by independent entities — that holds the key to all sorts of psi anomalies, including alien abductions? Another way of putting this question is to ask whether science should be investigating an open model of the human mind rather than the traditional closed one.

Several researchers have written about the religious, spiritual or otherworldly behaviour of UFOs and aliens. The respected ufologist Dr Jacques Vallee (1969/1993) claims that for centuries European folklore has described anomalous otherworld beings that occasionally interact with humans. Whether called gnomes, leprechauns, elves, or fairies, they appear to act in ways reminiscent of today's aliens. To help explain "the abductions and the psychic component" Vallee (1990a, p.284), writes:

I believe that the UFO phenomenon represents evidence for other dimensions beyond spacetime; the UFOs may not come from ordinary space, but from a multiverse which is all around us, and of which we have stubbornly refused to consider the disturbing reality in spite of the evidence available to us for centuries. (Vallee, 1990a, p.284)

Similarly, Keith Thompson (1993) suggests that there may exist "intermediate states of reality. ... Perhaps UFOs are temporary formations of psychic or quasi-psychic material independent of individual psyches, originating from corridors beyond our time-space coordinates yet in effect 'right here'" (p.45). Patrick Harpur (1994) claims that throughout history humans have interacted with otherworld entities who are capable of masquerading in a variety of guises such as spirits, guardian angels, demonic entities or aliens.

Richard Thompson (1993) compares UFO phenomena with the ancient Vedic literature of India. He points out that "mystical contacts with higher beings have been standard since time immemorial, and these contacts are said to still go on today" (p.212). He claims that Vedic literature describes anomalous aerial vehicles called *vimanas* which "had flight characteristics resembling those reported for UFOs, and the beings associated with them were said to possess powers similar to those presently ascribed to UFO entities" (p.214). Furthermore, in Vedic society it was believed possible to travel into "higher-dimensional regions" or "to leave the material universe altogether and travel through a graded arrangement of transcendental realms" (R.L. Thompson, 1993, p.214). Joseph Dormer (1993) suggests that anomalous beings such as spirits, angels, ghosts, goblins, demons, fairies and aliens may be "part and parcel of one single and underlying phenomenon" (p.142) which could mean that "the origin of all the world's religions ... might be explicable in terms of such encounters. It might well be that to solve the UFO mystery will be to solve *all* mysteries" (p.143). Dormer does not subscribe entirely to the otherworld hypothesis, but believes that ufologists should investigate

whether "it is the collective unconscious operating behind the whole charade" (p.152).

Psychologist Professor Kenneth Ring has investigated the similarities between NDEs and UFO close encounters. Ring (1992) found that both groups of respondents described experiences similar to shamanic initiations, leading him to conclude that "the increasing fascination with and immersion in the domain of extraordinary encounters may well presage the *shamanizing of modern humanity*" (p.239). By this he means that "we could be in the beginning stages of a major shift in *levels of consciousness* that will eventually lead to humanity's being able to live in two worlds at once — the physical and imaginal" (p.240). Ring (1992) explains that the term 'imaginal realm' was "originally proposed by a renowned Islamic scholar Henry Corbin in 1972" (p.220), and that not only is the realm "ontologically real, it is also a world that has form, dimension, and most important for us, *persons or entities*" (p.221). It seems that Ring and a majority of his respondents subscribe to the otherworld hypothesis to explain alien abductions.

Dr John Mack (2000a) notes that the spiritual aftermath of their alien encounters is of major significance to the abductees he has interviewed. Many undergo a "spiritual renaissance" (p.221) because they believe that the aliens they encounter "seem to have a connection with spirit or Source that we do not have or have lost" (p.223). Mack also notes the similarity between close encounters and shamanism:

Like shamans in their preparatory training or practicing their art, they [abductees] are brought by the experiences into nonordinary states of consciousness in which space and time lose their defining power and a world or worlds of nonhuman spirit beings becomes manifest. (Mack, 2000a, p.136)

These quotations demonstrate that many leading ufologists and the abductees they have interviewed believe that aliens originate from an inter-dimensional or spiritual otherworld. Further examples are to be found in 'channelled' material which has supposedly been obtained telepathically from aliens. Lyssa Royal and Keith Priest (1992) say they have interviewed several aliens, one of whom claims to "be a nonphysical group consciousness" (p.xiv), while others are supposedly physical beings from elsewhere in the universe. To conduct the interviews, Royal "puts herself into a meditative state" (p.xiv) and co-author Priest or "various other individuals attending the private or public gathering" (p.xiv) ask questions which Royal then communicates telepathically to an alien. Channelling information from



aliens resembles Spiritualists contacting spirits. As Jon Klimo (1991) points out, "In the majority of cases ... the aliens claim to come from vibratory domains finer than ours, usually from the etheric level between the physical and the supposed astral plane of deceased human spirits" (p.178).

There are three categories of levitation associated with UFOs and aliens. Firstly, some abductees report being levitated by aliens or by a beam of light from a UFO, or having seen aliens levitate during their close encounters. Secondly, a small number of abductees report finding themselves levitating spontaneously after their abduction experiences. Lastly, there are claims that UFO propulsion may involve some form of anti-gravity (Childress, 1986), which falls outside the parameters of this research project.

Richard Thompson (1993) quotes an example of the first type of levitation from the hypnosis transcripts of the abduction case of Sara Shaw in 1953 near Los Angeles. Sara initially describes floating along above the ground with some aliens, but then claims to be standing on a smooth, seemingly solid beam of light that is angled up like an escalator. "All of us are walking, but in addition, the beam is conveying us. The beam is moving" (p.284). Thompson comments that, "it seems that the light beam not only nullified Sara's weight but also enabled her to balance herself in an upright stance and walk normally" (p.284). This might be a form of human levitation, or an example of futuristic levitation or anti-gravity technology which enables aliens not only to levitate themselves but others as well, including animals. Vallee (1990a) reports that "in 1954 in the French countryside, a man who was coming back from the fields with his horse had to let go of the bridle as the animal was lifted several feet into the air — a dark, circular object was flying over the trail they were following" (p.176). As a measure of how often aliens appear to levitate, Dan Wright (1994, p.3), who was then the manager of the MUFON<sup>1</sup> Abduction Transcript Project in the USA, reports that 41% of the transcripts that mention how aliens move, describe them as gliding or levitating.

As an example of the second type of human levitation, Vallee (1990a) describes a UFO close encounter case that occurred in November 1968 in the south of France. The primary witness, a doctor, underwent changes to his health and attitude to life

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<sup>1</sup> The Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) is a large American ufology organisation that publishes the monthly *MUFON UFO Journal*. Their website is at [www.mufon.com](http://www.mufon.com)

after the encounter. In addition, "Coincidences of a telepathic nature are frequently reported, and the doctor has allegedly, on at least one occasion, experienced levitation without being able to control it" (p.176).

Interviewee Laura, who claims to be a repeat abductee, found herself levitating after her initial close encounter experience. She was lying on her bed, fully clothed, at 10 pm. Before falling asleep, she felt a powerful energy enter her body, starting on the right side of her head. "This is energy that I felt every day for the last three years. It touches all parts of my body." The energy increased in intensity "and then I started to rise off the bed". Laura thinks that she rose, in the horizontal position, "about a foot [30 cm]" above the bed. "The energy started to die down, very, very slowly and I started to come down ... until [I felt] the sensation of my back and bottom hitting the mattress ... until I was right back down into the mattress, feeling heavy again." The energy increased in intensity and for a second time she rose "about a metre" off the bed and then again slowly sank back onto the mattress. She calculates that she was in the air for about thirty seconds on the first occasion and "I'd say 60 to 80 seconds the second time". For a third time the energy intensified and she rose off the bed but promptly lost consciousness except for brief memories of another abduction experience. The first two levitations may have been aborted abduction attempts and the energy she felt could have been caused by an external agency. Aliens may have been trying to 'lift' Laura out of her body or even teleport her, but, because she physically levitated, they stopped and tried again until it worked. When asked about her belief in spirits and otherworld beings Laura replied that, "I can feel and sense spirits around me. ... There's dead humans, I sense dead humans. I sense ETs, I sense celestial beings, angels." She believes that everyone has some form of invisible guardian entity but notes that, regarding ETs and spirits, "They appear a bit different and I think they come from different places." It is interesting to note that both Laura and one of the people that the Spiritualist Edward helped levitate, felt an unusual energy or tingling sensation in their bodies while being levitated. It is unclear whether this energy comes from otherworld entities, from the unconscious mind, or elsewhere.

In a survey of UFO literature between 1975 and 1999, Australian ufologist Keith Basterfield (2001) found a link between UFOs and psi "which many UFO researchers have chosen to ignore" (p.30), perhaps because they feared that linking together two subjects about which most scientists are highly sceptical would

have undermined the credibility of their research. Basterfield discovered that "paranormal events mainly happen *after* a UFO event"; that a "childhood history of psychic experiences is often followed by adult UFO encounters"; and that "a high proportion of close encounter UFO experients report associated paranormal events" (p.53). He also notes the difficulty in ascertaining whether UFOs cause psi events or whether they are psi phenomena themselves (p.48).

In a second project, Basterfield and parapsychologist Dr Michael Thalbourne (2002, p.2) compared the "belief in, and alleged experience of, the paranormal (ESP, PK and life-after-death)" between a sample of abductees and a control group. Although their results showed that the abductees scored significantly higher than the control group, they were not specifically asked whether they believed that their close encounters caused the psi events they report. This survey notes that psi events correlate significantly with abduction experiences, which could mean that some are facilitated by aliens. Basterfield and Thalbourne's and my research (Harvey-Wilson, 2000, 2001) found that abductees report psi events and abilities before, during and after their close encounters. Some of the subsequent events — such as malfunctioning electrical devices — are also reminiscent of poltergeist activity. It is still unclear whether people are abducted because they already have psi abilities or whether close encounters initiate or enhance those abilities.

As the Otherworld Hypothesis reveals, the central belief of a significant percentage of ufologists and abductees mirrors that of the groups discussed so far; shamanism, poltergeist activity and Spiritualism. With minor differences, these groups postulate the existence of a spiritual or other-dimensional realm inhabited by invisible entities with psi abilities who can facilitate human levitation.

## **2.5 Martial Arts: Qigong**

It may appear paradoxical that martial arts traditions such as qigong have spiritual and psi components, because most people in the West associate spirituality and meditation with non-violence. But, as Murphy (1992) writes, "For many centuries, martial artists have made their training a way ... to realise extraordinary capacities. Most ideas that inform such training come from Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Shintoist, and shamanic teachings of the Far East" (p.448). It is these extraordinary capacities, some of which apparently involve making oneself heavier or lighter,

which are of interest to this research, although the main question being addressed in this section is whether these martial arts traditions involve a belief in spirits or spiritual powers and spirit realms. Parapsychologist Dr Elmar Gruber (1999) writes that qigong has "its roots in spiritual and physical exercises that date back to Taoist and Buddhist practices. Qigong means work or exercise with qi [chi]" (p.121).

Gruber explains that chi is

A basic term in Chinese medicine, in which it represents a natural force that permeates both the universe and man. Its actual meaning is very similar to the Hindu *prana* and the Greek *pneuma*, which refer to an energy that is both physical and mental, a power that both sustains life and shapes bodily form, and the direct expression of which is breath, a sort of link between the corporeal and the spiritual. (Gruber, 1999, p.121)

Although this definition does not mention spirits, it does refer to an unseen energy or force which can manifest in a physical manner. As with Spiritualism, an explanation for psi events that involves an impersonal spiritual energy can be regarded as analogous to one that involves unseen spirits, minus the personification or anthropomorphic component. In 1984 Chinese-American qigong instructor Paul Dong (1984, p.145) wrote that few Westerners knew anything about qigong. Today, qigong has become more popular in the West, although Maliszewski (1996) believes that "the depth of association that many of these disciplines had with specific religious traditions has gone unrecognised" (p.20). Like yoga or tai chi, qigong classes are largely about gentle bodily movements and focussed breathing, rather than concentrating on a belief in spirits and the development of psi abilities. Although Dong writes that "This ancient deep breathing technique ... is a key to developing paranormal abilities, and it has been known to the Chinese for centuries" (1984, p.145), traditional qigong practitioners were probably more interested in their health than developing psi abilities. Dong and Raffill (1997) explain that as well as "health, healing, and longevity" qigong's "powers also include the development of the latent potentials of the body" (p.131), which means that qigong "also evolved into a technique for strengthening martial arts abilities. Martial arts practitioners had to learn qi gong first to give them a solid base of energy with which to face their opponents and defend themselves" (p.131). Dong and Raffill add that in China, and to an increasing degree in the West, qigong is now regarded by the medical profession "as having a very high medicinal value" especially for chronic diseases that have no known treatment (p.131). This means that qigong is an ancient tradition that can today be used by ordinary people to maintain their health and fitness; by doctors to treat chronic diseases; by martial

arts practitioners to defend themselves or overcome others in unarmed combat; as well as producing in some of these people a wide range of psi abilities, including the capacity to levitate. These uses appear to be related because, in conjunction with physical fitness, the psi component of qigong may be what helps heal the sick and enhances various advanced martial arts techniques.

As well as qigong, other martial arts traditions have produced some levitation reports, perhaps because, although they have different fighting techniques, their basic spiritual practices are similar. As Murphy explained earlier, they have all evolved from traditions such as Buddhism or Taoism, although in the West these beliefs generally only apply to masters and their advanced students. Taoism acknowledges the existence of spirits and a spirit world (Cooper, 1972, p.30), as does Buddhism. In addition, Holmes Welch (1966) explains that Taoism was gradually influenced by Buddhism and adopted many of its beliefs. Most martial arts traditions share the spiritual practice of meditation, in which the participant learns "to shift his functioning from the ordinary ego to his deeper nature" (Murphy, 1992, p.449). By combining meditation and movement, practitioners can accumulate or tap into chi during combat. Geoff Pike (1980) writes that "Meditation was used to store and release energy at will, to conserve Chi and to unleash it with speed and power" (p.136). Trained practitioners can focus this energy specifically: "According to martial arts lore, ki [chi] operates in many ways, flowing through the arm to strengthen it, massing in the body to increase weight, or evanescing to make one lighter" (Murphy, 1992, p.452). Because chi is regarded as a universal energy to which anyone can gain personal access, one could argue that it has no spiritual qualities, despite the fact that the martial arts derived from Buddhism and/or Taoism, and advanced masters frequently include a spiritual dimension in their teachings. Dong (1984) favours a scientific approach to investigating the psi aspects of qigong and omits references to spirits, although he does note that ultimately chi transcends the human body. "Chinese philosophy holds that qi [chi] is the primal matrix of creation from which springs the yin and yang forces that give rise to substance and material forms" meaning that a qigong master "controls the very forces of life" (p.146). He asserts that the ultimate goal of mastering chi "is to become one with it so that your entire existence is simply yet wonderfully blended with the forces of the universe in a self transcendent manner" (Dong, 1984, p.146). Similarly, Morihei Uyeshiba, who founded aikido, claimed that "all the universe was one, and that the true aim of the martial arts must therefore

be to be in harmony with the universe" (in Barclay, 1973, p.45). One could claim that such beliefs are a form of impersonal mysticism. Dong (1997) also notes that, especially with respect to healing, "chi is related to the spirit, and chi only appears in particular spiritual states. These states are meditation, relaxation, and concentration" (p.139). Despite preferring to use impersonal terminology Dong nevertheless seems to regard spiritual and psi forces as almost identical.

"The mysterious component of Asian martial arts is often associated with the development of paranormal skills" (Maliszewski, 1996, p.130). Dong (1984) notes that there are several terms within qigong to describe the psi abilities that a practitioner may develop. "Those who can master *nei yang gong* can reduce their weight — that is they can levitate. To use a more common term ... it is called *ching gong* (lightweight gong)" (p.167). Dong gives an example of a Chinese soldier who was filmed in 1981 walking on top of a row of six match boxes and then standing on just two without crushing them (p.168). The soldier, who had learned ching gong from his grandfather, held his breath while appearing to make himself lighter. Dong then provides an example that comes closer to levitation:

In the Wen Zhou City Hospital in Zhe Jiang Province, there is a seventy-four-year-old doctor of Chinese medicine called Lin Hung Da. When he wants to, he can jump up from the ground and suspend himself in the air with only his hands touching a wall. He can even have his back touch a wall and by using the back muscles he can crawl higher and higher. This amazing art is called *bi hu gong*, which literally means 'the tiger climbing up the wall.' (Dong, 1984, p.167)

Dong tells us that a second doctor "who works at the Wen Zhou City Si Tai Disease Prevention Center, heals patients only by using qi gong. ... When he gathers his qi [chi] he is able to raise himself from the ground and float in the air" (1984, p.167). Finally, Dong describes how in 1981 with some friends in Canton (now Guangzhou) he watched a qigong master called Wu Zhen as he "moved up and down in the air from his sitting position" (p.167).

Kosta Danaos (2000, 2002) describes the exploits and teachings of his Chinese-Javanese neikung master John Chang, who "is the Headmaster of a kung fu lineage whose roots can be traced back twenty-four hundred years" (Danaos, 2000, p.8). Quoting his master's teachings, Danaos writes that "It is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins, but essentially ch'ikung [qigong] centers on the development and control of yang ch'i ... while neikung involves the joint employment

of yang ch'i and yin ch'i" (p.21). Neikung is a higher form of qigong because "Yang ch'i cannot pass beyond the confines of the physical body, while yin ch'i can and so may impart to the practitioner preternatural abilities such as those demonstrated by Master Chang" (p.22). Likewise, Daniel Reid (1998) explains that neikung is the 'internal alchemy' of qigong in which, through practice such as meditation, an adept's essence can be transformed into spiritual powers such as ESP and PK (pp.81-84). While explaining to Danaos (2000) that a mastery of chi facilitates numerous psi abilities, Master Chang mentioned human levitation, saying: "It took me only a few months to learn that trick. ... You just rise up about a yard [92 cm] off the ground and sit there; you cannot move in any direction, just back down" (p.158). Danaos excitedly asked for a demonstration, so Chang

sat down on the floor, crossing his legs in a full lotus. He became still; it appeared that his breathing stopped. He was a statue of an Eastern mystic for a time. Smoothly and suddenly, almost matter-of-factly, he rose from the floor at least eight inches [20 cm], and remained there. My breath caught in my throat; after half a minute or so, John came back down. "The carpet is synthetic," he said, standing up, "otherwise I would have risen much more." (Danaos, 2000, p.158)

Danaos did not inquire why Master Chang could only levitate straight up and down — unlike Joseph of Cupertino who sometimes flew seemingly purposeful trajectories— or why a synthetic carpet would inhibit his levitation, but what is relevant from the perspective of this research is that Danaos later describes Master Chang's ability to communicate with spirits while deep in meditation — the result of his advanced martial arts training. A friend of Chang's had recently moved into a house and had heard strange noises which he believed were from a spirit. As a neikung master, Chang was asked to come and investigate. Chang explained to Danaos (2002) that "Spirits are bound by space and time the same way as anything that exists, but on a different level because they are a part of the yin world. We ourselves are yang; they are yin" (p.51). Danaos quotes Chang's explanations of the distinction between yin and yang throughout his books; for example:

Everything on earth is yang, though the earth is yin. We, as humans, are yang creatures, but we have yin energy as well. It is the combination of the two that gives us life. When we die, when we cease to have life, our awareness moves to the yin state of being. ... But it does not remain unaltered in the process. (in Danaos, 2002, p.52)

At the supposedly haunted house offerings for the spirit, such as incense, tea, cakes and a cigarette, had been put on a table. The room was only lit by candles because of the belief that the yang attributes of bright light might scare the spirit away. Master Chang entered a meditative state and repeated aloud the spirit's

answers to his questions. Some of the offerings started to move and the incense burner smashed on the floor because, as Chang explained, the spirit was an old Muslim man who did not like incense. When dialogue recommenced an agreement was made that the spirit would protect those in the house and receive weekly food offerings. When asked how the spirit was able to move objects on the offering table, Chang explained that, while he was deep in meditation, the spirit would "be able to take yang ch'i from me, and he will be able to move the objects" (in Danaos, 2002, p.56). This is a more complex explanation for PK than is currently provided by Spiritualists or parapsychologists. If a meditating neikung master can provide yang chi to a spirit, who only has yin chi, the two energies combined may produce what appear to be psi phenomena. Whether this means that Master Chang levitated by getting yin chi from the ground to mix with his own yang chi, is not explained by Danaos. If that was happening, perhaps levitation can work in two ways. A person with enough yang energy may be able to levitate either by absorbing yin energy from the ground or by getting it from a cooperative spirit. Testing this theory might be difficult, but these alternatives match the two theories about poltergeist activity, where it is disputed whether unconscious personal PK energy or the energy of spirits is what levitates people and moves objects, or whether it could be a combination of the two. Master Chang's spiritual encounter suggests that, as a result of the deep meditation that is an integral part of their training, advanced qigong practitioners may develop a belief in spirits. For example, Danaos (2002) claims that during his years of qigong training with Master Chang he has "spoken with spirits and can testify to their reality" (p.3).

Because beginners do not need to believe in spirits, martial arts instructors in Western countries may initially omit spiritual references that might alienate people who already have their own religious beliefs. An example of this emerged during my interview with qigong and tai chi instructor Maurice. In about 1985, Maurice was given verbal permission to use a Christian church hall for his classes. Later the priest asked what exactly the classes were about and was horrified to hear that it was tai chi. "Not tai chi in my church" he exclaimed, because, in his ignorance, he apparently believed that tai chi mingles the concepts of good and bad. Later Maurice received anonymous letters claiming that the devil was involved in his classes. During my interviews with qigong instructors (all of whom were male) I asked if they regarded qigong as a spiritual or religious activity. Most of them said that, although it had a spiritual component, qigong was definitely not a religion.



Jeremy insists that qigong "has no religious connotations. It is an exercise."

William explains that "It's definitely not religious or spiritual, although it can incline a person towards that direction. It's a physiological method for controlling ... the internal energy of the body." Maurice claims that qigong is "just a philosophy. It's not anything to do with religion," but he acknowledges that it is spiritual "because spiritual is part of the mind." John, who is involved in qigong healing, agrees;

"Definitely a philosophy and spiritual, but nothing religious." Bradley acknowledges that "qigong is largely Taoist, but there's been a lot of Buddhist influence and even ... yoga influences," so that today one "could even regard it as a physical practice."

Bernard believes that qigong is spiritual because it "helps you get in touch with yourself," by which he means that by going deeper one can discover that one is part of a universal or "divine energy". Only Peter, an ordained Taoist monk, regards qigong as "both a philosophy and religious practice". As mentioned earlier, it seems that most of these Western instructors are inclined to secularise qigong.

When asked whether they personally believed in spirits, some of the qigong teachers adopted a secular perspective, while others said yes. William believes that a ghost realm exists and accepts the traditional Chinese belief that "there are two energies; there's life and there's matter. We're life and we've been impregnated into matter." Jeremy insists that whatever a person's beliefs are about spirits, it has nothing to do with qigong. John says that people do have a soul or spirit which leaves the body at death, but would prefer to regard it as chi or energy. Bernard believes in spirits and a spirit realm, as does Peter who adds the Taoist perspective that "we all come from the aspect of universal consciousness, and ... we all return as part of universal consciousness. We return from whence we came." Bradley, too, has no doubt that humans have a soul or spirit that enters its own realm at death, but points out that "the whole point of Taoism is to become immortal," meaning that "the whole practice [of qigong] is about transforming your essence into your energy or spiritual body." John Blofeld's *Taoism: The Quest for Immortality* (1979) illustrates that those qigong practitioners who adopt a Taoist perspective are more likely to believe in spirits of the dead. Becoming a Taoist immortal does not refer to the physical body living forever. Dr Gillian Ross (1993) explains that the Taoist alchemical tradition "seemed to emphasize spiritual rather than physical immortality. The name of the game is to become one with the Tao and by implications, immortal" (p.180). Danaos regards Master Chang as an immortal because he can meditate deeply enough to communicate with spirits. A person who

can remain lucid at this level of meditation is supposedly capable of remaining conscious or 'alive' after the death of the physical body, and so becomes, in effect, immortal. Chang describes his astonishment when his dead master, Liao Sifu, first demonstrated his immortality by appearing in the flesh in the corner of his bedroom and then explained to Chang that "This is the speciality of our type of training, that after death you retain the characteristics and powers you had when you were alive. ... You can take all your yang ch'i with you" (in Danaos, 2000, p.44). Chang subsequently called on his dead master numerous times and found that although others could always hear his voice, only about ten percent of people could see him "in varying hues. I think you have to have a lot of yin ch'i to see a spirit plainly. ... to some people he was transparent, to others as solid as you or I" (p.45).

A belief in spirits and psi abilities is not essential for qigong practitioners, especially in the West. However, it appears that within many martial arts traditions there are a small number of people who develop psi abilities such as levitation, but only after meditating enough to access or accumulate sufficient chi, which they regard as a universal, spiritual energy that can facilitate psi events. Many of these advanced practitioners also believe in spirits and, like spirit mediums, may develop the capacity to communicate with them. This reveals several similarities between the other groups and qigong, but what distinguishes it from, for example, Spiritualism, is the precision of its training techniques and explanations, and the numerous uses to which qigong can be put.

## **2.6 Mysticism**

This section will focus primarily on the mysticism of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam because the majority of religious levitations involve mystics. The primary question is whether mystics, especially those that develop psi abilities such as human levitation, believe in spirits and spirit realms. It seems that most mystics, whatever their religion, are more interested in God or the Godhead than lesser spiritual beings, but it is nevertheless fundamental to their beliefs that a spiritual realm does exist. Most definitions of mysticism assume that all mystics are seeking the same outcome, although their techniques may vary. The problem with defining mysticism is that it is primarily an internal activity that often involves deep contemplation or meditation, so there is little for a witness to observe, unless perhaps the mystic is levitating. Evelyn Underhill (1915/n.d.), defines mysticism as "the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in

greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment" (p.3).

Guiley (1991) defines mysticism as "The belief in or pursuit of unification with the One or some other principle; the immediate consciousness of God; or the direct experience of religious truth" (p.387). She also believes that "Mysticism is nearly universal and unites most religions in the quest for the One" (p.387). Throughout history mystics have struggled to describe the extraordinary breakthrough states of consciousness that they experience as a result of their sustained interiorization.

The Jesuit, Elmer O'Brien, provides a generic description of mystic experiences:

1. The object encountered in mystic experience is thought by the mystic to be somehow ultimate.
2. The manner of confrontation is immediate, direct.
3. The confrontation is always different from the familiar exercise of either sense perception or of reasoning. (O'Brien, 1965, p.14)

As these definitions illustrate, some mystics use impersonal terms — such as Reality, the Absolute, the One, the Self, cosmic consciousness, or the Godhead — to describe what they have encountered, or they anthropomorphise and claim to have come face to face, or even merged, with God. For example, the modern mystic Andrew Harvey says that, "A mystic is someone who has direct cognition of God beyond thought and image. A mystic is one whose eyes have been opened through purification, discipline and grace to the living mystery and lives consciously in the divine presence" (Harvey & Matousek, 1994, p.21). As I have written previously,

Mystics actively seek a deeper experience of the spiritual or divine essence within themselves. Paradoxically, this experience eventually transcends their individuality, and immerses them in a universal consciousness which they claim is the fundamental basis of reality. This spiritual breakthrough from duality to unity has been termed enlightenment, illumination, self-realisation, or a variety of other terms. (Harvey-Wilson, 1997, p.8)

Hollenback (1996) explains that mysticism involves focusing one's attention inwards in the hope that eventually one can quieten the internal chatter that fills most people's minds. "When this mental background noise ceases ... a dramatic change in the mystic's mode of consciousness takes place" (p.1). This change or mystical experience, he claims, is as different as normal consciousness is to dreaming. One could claim that, when entering an altered state of consciousness (ASC), the mystic — like a shaman or spirit medium — is accessing another dimension or realm inhabited by invisible spiritual entities. A different interpretation is that, by remaining motionless and stilling the mind, the mystic is attempting to trigger an internal mechanism that normally only operates at death, or during NDEs,

which ejects that person's soul or spirit out of the physical body into this spiritual otherworld. Whether one uses the term 'realm' or 'ASC', it appears that those who have had these experiences are more likely to develop psi abilities than those who have not. Ring (1992) found that 51.5% of people reporting UFO close encounters and 60.8% of near-death experiencers claim an increase in psi abilities (p.277), which appears to be similar to shamans developing these abilities after their initiation journeys into the spirit realm. A survey of mystics would probably reveal similar results.

**Christianity.** As members of a monotheistic religion that believes in life-after-death, most Christians believe in a divine realm containing God, a hierarchy of spiritual beings such as archangels and angels and spirits of the dead. For the deceased to be canonised into sainthood in the Catholic Church there must be proof of several miracles resulting from believers praying for intercession. Whether the would-be saint is causing the miracle, or petitioning God for assistance, the point is that Christians believe that spirits from another realm are capable of facilitating psi events. However, as Kenneth Woodward (1991) points out, not all saints are mystics and not all mystics are saints (p.160). Within Catholicism there are many reports of human levitation, primarily by mystics or saints, although "Levitation cannot be put forward as one of the miracles required either for beatification or canonisation" (Thurston, 1952, p.31), so the nineteen saints in Brewer's *A Dictionary of Miracles* (1884/1966, p.215) who were "lifted up" were canonised for other reasons.

Leroy (1928, pp.39-135) fills nine chapters discussing levitating Catholics. In his opinion "the case of St Joseph of Cupertino is a very strong one" (p.169). Born in 1603 in Cupertino, Italy, Joseph was often seen levitating by many witnesses. During a visit to Rome he spontaneously levitated as he knelt to kiss the feet of Pope Urban VIII (Tutt, 1997, p.8) who was so impressed that he volunteered to testify to the reality of the event (p.8). Several researchers have studied the Franciscan friar (Bartman, 2003; Braude, 1986; Chambers, 1998; Cornwell, 1991; Dingwall, 1947/1962; Thurston, 1952). Leroy writes that, once while walking outdoors, a priest said to him "Brother Joseph, what a beautiful heaven God has made!" whereupon Joseph levitated up into an olive tree,

And he remained on the tree half an hour, in kneeling posture, lightly poised on a branch that could be seen to wave to and fro as if a bird

had been perched on it. When he came to himself, he could not come down, and required a ladder to do it. (Leroy, 1928, p.92)

Joseph was a mystic who was deeply devoted to Mary, and could only levitate while in a trance. Pastrovicchi (1918/1980) describes how Joseph "was often enraptured and lifted from the ground" on hearing the words 'Holy Mary', 'Holy Mother of God', 'Mother of Divine Grace', 'Mother of God', or 'Gate of Heaven' (p.52). Although he and those around him clearly believed that his levitations were a sign of divine grace, Chambers (1998) notes that Joseph appeared to have "no control over the timing and nature of his levitations" (p.166), and that he "never offered an explanation as to the nature of his levitations, describing them as fits of 'giddiness'" (p.167). Joseph's levitations and lifestyle are well-documented; he fasted almost continuously; he had numerous other psi abilities; his levitations involved hovering as well as directed flight; at times he lifted others into the air; and the Church's ambivalence towards him is illustrated by the fact that he was called before the Inquisition while alive and made a saint after his death.

Although Christian mystics such as Joseph believe in the existence of spiritual beings such as angels, they are more likely to attribute miraculous events to God or divine grace. The mystic St Teresa of Avila, who was seen levitating by many witnesses, refers to "our Lord" as the cause of her levitations (in Leroy, 1928, p.70). Teresa wrote about her levitations in her memoirs and, when in public, at times tried to resist them because, as the prioress of a convent, she "was afraid it would occasion much talk" (p.69). She writes that

The moment that I felt that our Lord was about to repeat the act [of levitation], and once, in particular, during a sermon ... I threw myself on the ground; then the nuns came around to hold me; but still the rapture was observed. I made many supplications to our Lord, that he would be pleased to give me no more of those graces that were outwardly visible. (in Leroy, 1928, p.70)

Thurston (1952) says that Teresa, "being perfectly conscious of the physical effect of levitation produced on many occasions by these raptures, persistently fought against all such exterior manifestations which betrayed her privileged condition as a friend of God and made her appear singular" (p.11). One of St Teresa's most famous levitations happened while she was talking to St John of the Cross, who had come to her convent to visit her. They were speaking about the Trinity through a grate when "he was rapt in ecstasy and rose from the floor, lifting up his seat along with him into the air. St Teresa, who was kneeling, was also lifted up above the ground" (Leroy, 1928, p.71). As to what causes the levitation of saints and mystics,

Thurston (1952) explains that "Theologians for the most part offer the rough and ready solution that in the case of holy people it is a manifestation of divine power, effected perhaps through the ministry of angels" (p.30). Woodward (1991) quotes Father Sarno at the Vatican who points out that, while assessing the miraculous powers of potential saints, "We have to ask whether are they of divine origin, diabolical origin, or are they merely the effects of an emotionally disturbed person" (p.163). Although he is not just talking about levitation, Father Sarno seems to acknowledge that, as with poltergeist activity, psi events can be caused by both spiritual powers and the human mind.

**Hinduism.** Unlike the other great world religions, Hinduism has no founder, no fixed dogma and is highly diverse. Hinduism venerates several ancient collections of writings such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. As well as providing examples of levitating mystics, this section will focus on whether Hindus believe in a divine realm inhabited by spiritual beings who are responsible for psi abilities such as levitation. One has only to glance through Harshananda's *Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (1982) and A.G. Mitchell's book (1982/1992) of the same name to realise that Hinduism believes in a vast pantheon of divine beings, although, as Harshananda notes, "there can be as many spiritual paths as there are spiritual aspirants" so long as one does not forget "that these gods are the doorways leading to the one Godhead" (1982, p.xvii). The Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) describes the inner progress towards enlightenment:

The more you advance towards God the less you will see of His glories and grandeur. The aspirant at first has a vision of the Goddess with ten arms; there is a great display of power in that image. The next vision is that of the Deity with two arms; there are no longer ten arms holding various weapons and missiles. Then the aspirant has a vision of Gopala, in which there is no trace of power. It is the form of a tender child. Beyond that there are other visions also. The aspirant then sees only Light. (in Gupta, 1974, p.110)

Ramakrishna's description implies that all mystical pathways transcend mental concepts and visual imagery to access something universal that lies beyond them. Whether this includes transcending one's belief in spirits is not clear. Another view of mysticism is that one must learn to merge one's inner self with the omnipresent universal Self, although some point out that one's individual self has always been a part of the universal Self, but that the aspirant has been unconscious of that fact. The mystic Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) explained to Paul Brunton that

When a man knows his true self for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it the soul and others again Nirvana, and Hindus call it Liberation; you may give it what name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself. (in Osborne, 1954/1970, p.20)

Although there are those who would question whether yoga should be classified with Hinduism, it is included here because most advanced yogis are indistinguishable from mystics. As Guiley (1991) points out, "In yoga one seeks to become bound to divine reality. ... the search for the mystery of the universe is undertaken in a search for one's own true self" (p.657). As with qigong, one cannot claim that every Westerner attending yoga classes is seeking union with God or the Infinite, but this is because most beginners are doing Hatha yoga which involves physical exercises and postures called *asanas*. Unless they progress further and develop a deeper interest, they may be unaware that other branches of yoga exist, such as Raja yoga which is "the path of mind control through concentration, breath control, posture, meditation, and contemplation. Raja yoga is the most metaphysical of yogas" (Guiley, 1991, p.657). Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946/1983) combines the mystical practices of yoga and Hinduism. After recounting how the yogi Bhaduri Mashasaya was seen levitating "in the air, several feet above the ground" (p.70) at a meeting of his followers in Calcutta, Yogananda explains that

A yogi's body loses its grossness after use of certain *pranayamas* [breathing exercises]. Then it will levitate or hop around like a leaping frog. Even saints who do not practice a formal yoga have been known to levitate during a state of intense devotion to God. (Yogananda, 1946/1983, p.71)

Yogananda says that when miracles occur "The consciousness of a perfected yogi is effortlessly identified not with a narrow body but with the universal structure. ... Gravitation ... is powerless to compel a master to exhibit the property of weight" (p.315). Although providing little practical information about levitation, Yogananda also writes that "He who knows himself as the omnipresent Spirit is subject no longer to the rigidities of a body in time and space" (p.315). As with the concept of chi and the collective term 'spirit' in Spiritualism, this explanation refers to a universal spiritual force that can produce psi events, rather than individual spirits. Mirroring Ramakrishna's earlier quotation, Yogananda says that the ultimate mystical experience is one of light: "A yogi who through perfect meditation has

merged his consciousness with the Creator perceives the cosmical essence as light ... to him there is no difference between the light rays composing water and the light rays composing land" (p.315). Yogananda (1946/1983) claims that the spiritual essence of Hinduism, yoga and Christianity are similar: "The law of miracles is operable by any man who has realised that the essence of creation is light" (p.316).

In Hinduism and Buddhism *siddhis* are psi abilities that may develop as a result of yogic or mystical practices. Although there are supposedly eight great *siddhis*, there are several other psi abilities experienced by mystics. Walker (1968) explains that the third *siddhi* is "*laghima* or weightlessness: the power that enables one to levitate and move about at extraordinary speed," and the fourth is "*garima* or weightfulness: the power of becoming 'even as heavy as a mountain, so that one cannot be moved'" (p.394). This sounds like excessive gravitation, which martial arts practitioners seek to develop, and which may occur involuntarily in spirit possession, but it is unclear whether it is levitation in reverse or an unrelated ability. Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutras* summarise yoga's philosophy and techniques. Taimini (1975) translates section three, sutra 40, as "By mastery over *Udana* levitation and non-contact with water, mire, thorns etc." (p.346). He explains that *udana* is one of the five forms of *prana* that exist within the body and "is obviously connected with the gravitational pull of the earth on the body and by controlling this particular *prana* it is possible to neutralise this pull" (p.346). Patanjali may have deliberately written his sutras cryptically so they would only make sense to advanced students, especially as psi abilities are often seen as spiritual distractions. The sutra and Taimini's (1975) explanation tell us little about levitation, other than acknowledging its existence, but originally "all students of yoga were made to commit it [the whole book] to memory and meditate regularly and deeply on the sutras for bringing out (sic) their hidden meanings" (p.ix). Spirits are not mentioned in the levitation sutra or Taimini's explanation, but a more detailed definition of *prana* is that it is a "cosmic energy that penetrates and maintains the body" and *udana* "works in the upper part of the body and furthers spiritual development by creating a bridge between the physical and spiritual aspects of one's nature" (Friedrichs, 1999, p.275). *Prana* sounds like *chi*, both of which can apparently be controlled by breathing exercises, as discussed in a later chapter.

Idries Shah (1956/1973), a researcher and writer on Oriental philosophy and religion, believes that spirits are relevant to psi abilities:



Hindu occult science rests upon the belief that power over anything and everything on earth may be obtained by means of benign spirits. ... such beings may be souls of the departed, or simply disembodied entities under whose supervision come the laws of nature. (Shah, 1956/1973, p.141)

He explains that "to interfere with the law of gravity, the spirit guarding that law must be invoked, and beseeched for help" (p.141). To investigate the matter, Shah "induced a Hindu magician of considerable importance to demonstrate certain tricks to me" (p.141). The man came to Shah's bungalow and, having checked that "there was no confederate or apparatus present" (p.141), Shah asked him to levitate one of the veranda chairs. The magician closed his eyes, extended his hands towards the largest chair on the veranda, and appeared to concentrate hard. In ten seconds "the chair seemed to rise into the air, and, turning slightly, actually hover in space, about five feet up [1.52 m]" (p.141). Shah grabbed the legs of the chair and pulled it down to the floor but, when he let it go, "it sailed upward again". Shah asked if he could sit on the chair: "Pulling it down again — the thing seemed to have a life of its own by now — I sat upon the seat and *rose into the air on it*" (Shah, 1956/1973, p.141). To check that he had not been hypnotised, Shah then asked the magician to levitate all the chairs on the veranda, which he did. Shah is not using the term 'magician' in the modern sense, and points out that such feats or "miracles" stem "from a mystical approach to wonder-working" (p.140). He does not, however, quote the Hindu magician's explanation for levitation.

The French judge and traveller Louis Jacolliot (1884/1971) relates how in 1866 he befriended a Hindu fakir called Covindasamy, in the Indian holy city of Benares. On several occasions Covindasamy demonstrated his psi abilities and, when asked how he did them, replied, "It is not a natural force that acts. I am but an instrument. I evoke the ancestral spirits, and it is they who manifest their power" (p.230). Jacolliot had asked many fakirs the same question "and they have nearly all made the same answer. They look upon themselves only as intermediaries between this world and the invisible spirits" (p.230). The judge asked Covindasamy for a demonstration of "elevation".

Taking an ironwood cane which I had brought from Ceylon, he leaned heavily upon it, resting his right hand upon the handle, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. He then proceeded to utter the appropriate incantations. ... the Fakir rose gradually about two feet [61 cm] from the ground. His legs were crossed beneath him, and he made no change in his position, which was very like that of those bronze statues of Buddha. ... For more than twenty minutes I tried to see how

Covindasamy could thus fly in the face and eyes of all the known laws of gravity; it was entirely beyond my comprehension; the stick gave him no visible support, and there was no apparent contact between that and his body except through his right hand. (Jacolliot, 1884/1971, p.237)

There are several other levitation reports that involve sticks. If the levitator is not resting on it, surely the demonstration would be more convincing without the stick, unless it is essential for some reason. Using qigong theory, perhaps the stick is allowing yin chi to flow from the ground which, when mixed appropriately with the fakir's yang chi, enables levitation to that height to occur. A few days later, Covindasamy levitated to about half that height without a stick. Standing near a door, he crossed his arms and rose slowly "to the height of about ten to twelve inches [25-30 cm]" (p.257). He remained in the air for over eight minutes according to Jacolliot's chronometer and claimed he could levitate like that whenever he wished. To explain this ability, Covindasamy quotes the lines "He should be in constant communications with heaven, and a superior spirit should descend therefrom" (p.258). He may have needed less yin chi to levitate to this height or perhaps he obtained the yin chi from a spirit.

**Buddhism.** Whether one regards Buddhism as a philosophy or a religion, it has produced numerous mystics and levitation reports and is increasingly popular in the West. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama in the fifth century BCE and today has many sects and schools. Concentrating primarily on the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet, this section will demonstrate that Buddhist mystics believe in spiritual realms, entities and powers, some of whom can facilitate psi events such as levitation. Buddhism inherited much of its cosmology from Hinduism; for example, both believe in spiritual beings called devas, which some Buddhists regarded as gods or celestial beings that inhabit various heavenly realms as a result of their good deeds, but are still subject to the cycle of rebirth. Blofeld (1974) explains that "To [Tibetan] Buddhists, the universe is alive with invisible beings, who in fact constitute four of the six orders of existence, the other two being men and animals" (p.72). Tibetans apparently "pay court to supernatural beings but only with a view to obtaining their protection or mundane favours" because "The gods have nothing to do with the search for enlightenment" (Blofeld, 1974, p.116). Fischer-Schreiber (1999a, p.86) writes that "There are in Buddhism twenty-eight divine realms, of which six are in the realm of desire ... eighteen in the realm of desireless form ... and four in the realm of the bodiless". Edward Conze

(1959/1986) notes that in addition to heavens and hells, there are 'intermediary states' and "the 'Pure Lands' of the cosmic Buddhas" (p.221). He writes that "Buddhist theology knows of about thirty kinds of gods," although these "gods' are in a way really 'angels' and their 'heavens' might also be called 'paradises'" (p.221). However, as Blofeld explains,

The benign and nightmarish figures in the [Tibetan] sacred pictures, unlike gods and demons elsewhere, are recognised by the faithful as the products of their own minds, as symbolic representations of the phantasmagoria that haunts the threshold of human consciousness, and as the personifications of the forces of passion called into being by the everlasting play of mind. (Blofeld, 1974, p.38)

Tantric Buddhists believe that some spiritual beings have an independent existence, while others are seen as entities "lurking on the threshold of the human consciousness whom C.G. Jung calls archetypes" (Blofeld, 1974, p.73). This suggests that the human mind and spirit realms form a continuum and, as with poltergeist activity, raises the question of whether psi events are caused by independent spirits, internal PK forces, or both.

The goal of Buddhist or yogic techniques is to achieve enlightenment or Nirvana which, as Blofeld (1974) explains, is often described using analogies "deduced from the mystical perception that arises in meditation. The descriptions of it include radiant light, ecstatic bliss, infinity, wholeness, eternity, reality, shining void, the union of opposites, boundless compassion, immaculate undifferentiated mind and many, many more" (p.50). He notes that Buddhist, Christian and Sufi mystics may describe God in a similar manner because "Doubtless they have experienced the same reality" (p.50), but they may interpret their experiences differently.

Buddhists do not equate this shining reality with a creator of the universe; they hold Nirvana to be not the presence of God, nor a heaven inhabited by individual souls, but a state of being beyond duality in which all beings are at one with one another and with Nirvana itself. (Blofeld, 1974, p.50)

Blofeld points out that regarding Buddhism as a godless religion is an unfortunate interpretation because "Mystics of other religions who take the term 'God' to mean ultimate, divine reality — uncreated, sublime, omnipresent, immaculate, void of duality and the source of infinite compassion, but nevertheless impersonal — come very close to the Buddhist position" (p.52). Buddhist mystics, it seems, regard the ultimate level of spirituality as impersonal, although they are prepared to acknowledge the existence of invisible spiritual beings such as devas. Blofeld

(1974) explains that in Tantric mysticism "The forces at work in the universe are visualized in plural form because, in its non-void aspect, the universe is in fact plural" (p.116). This reveals that Buddhist mystics transcend the empirical argument as to whether spirits exist or not by defining reality as having different levels or realms which are linked by consciousness.

Mackenzie (1999) provides an example of a Tibetan Buddhist's belief in spiritual beings. The English woman, Tenzin Palmo, spent many years meditating in the mountains of northern India. When a young shepherd boy started acting strangely near her cave, Palmo prayed to "her old friends" the local Dakinis, who are female Buddhist spiritual entities, asking them to "change his mind and help him" (p.91). A few days later the boy appeared transformed; he left her a bunch of flowers, fixed her spring and began smiling instead of scowling. The boy's transformation might have been coincidental, caused by spirits, or praying to the Dakinis may have been Palmo's way of indirectly affecting the boy with her own powers, because Buddhist mystics are traditionally advised not to use the psi abilities they may develop.

Among the many psi abilities that may develop as a result of sustained Buddhist meditation, Conze (1959/1986) lists two "magical powers" (p.122) that sound like levitation. The first is described as, "He walks on water without sinking into it," and the second as, "Cross-legged he floats along like a bird on the wing" (p.126). To walk on water, the Buddhist scriptures advise the practitioner to visualise it as a supporting "disk of clay", and to fly, an area of air big enough to sit, lie or walk on should be visualised as being composed of earth. Although this does not explain how levitation works, any meditator who tried it would probably need to have powerful visualization abilities. This technique suggests that some psi abilities may work more easily if packaged in a familiar manner. For example, it might help to levitate if one visualises walking up a flight of stairs.

John Keel (1957) tells of meeting a Buddhist lama called Nyang-Pas who, though originally from Tibet, "now spent his life alone in the hills of Bhutan and Sikkim, searching for the 'right ways'" (p.185). Having heard of the lama's psi abilities, Keel asked him for a demonstration. From sitting cross-legged on the floor, the lama

struggled to his feet, pressed one hand on the top of his stick, a heavy branch about four feet [1.22 m] long, frowned a little with effort, and then slowly lifted his legs up off the floor until he was sitting cross-legged in the air! There was nothing behind him or under him. His sole

support was his stick, which he seemed to use to keep his balance. I was astounded. "Can you teach me this?" I asked hopefully. "No ... it is not something you can learn overnight. It is a matter of will." He conducted the rest of our conversation sitting there in empty space. (Keel, 1957, p.186)

This example is similar to Jacolliot's description of the levitating Hindu fakir, Covindasamy, although the lama advocates will-power while the fakir puts the responsibility on spirits. Rather than attributing this to a difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, I suggest that it results from a difference in their religious cultural context. Jacolliot (1884/1971) explains that Covindasamy was in Benares to "take charge of the remains of a rich Malibar" from the merchant caste because, according to Hindu belief, "those who die in the Holy City are not obliged to go through any further transformations, but their souls immediately ascend to the abode of Brahma and are absorbed into the great soul" (p.229). If Covindasamy specialised in spirits of the dead, it is not surprising that he attributes his powers to them. It also illustrates the similarities between the seven groups; by attributing his levitations to spirits, Covindasamy is acting like a Spiritualist, and by presiding over ceremonies to assist the dead in the afterlife, he is acting like a psychopomp, which is one of the roles of a shaman. The lama Nyang-Pas does not comment on spirits in Keel's book, so it is not possible to compare his beliefs with Covindasamy's.

While discussing beliefs in the origins of psi abilities, Hollenback notes that

many of the Buddhist and Hindu practitioners of yoga ... claim that whenever a yogin begins to manifest supernormal powers ... he has acquired [them] ... by means of his own efforts of mental discipline. ... without the assistance of any god or spirit-being. Consequently, their spiritual powers had an intrapsychic origin, an origin *inside* the mind or psyche of the yogin. (Hollenback, 1996, p.356)

Debating whether a mystic's psi abilities originate from within the mind or elsewhere suggests a poor understanding of mysticism. Considerable mental discipline is needed to become an advanced meditator, but if, by going inwards, a mystic has achieved an internal breakthrough to a transcendent, spiritual reality that facilitate psi abilities — as most shamans do during their initiation experiences — then the term 'within the mind' now means something quite different. An advanced or enlightened mystic's 'mind' has now become a gateway to powers that are beyond the individual mind. A mystic who involuntarily becomes the victim of these forces could be described as possessed, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Like shamans and Spiritualists, Tibetan Buddhist mystics believe in both spirits and a transcendent spiritual energy that can facilitate psi phenomena.

**Islam.** Sufis are the mystics of the Islamic religion. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that Islam acknowledges the existence of a spirit realm and spiritual entities, and that there are reports of Islamic or Sufi mystics levitating. "Sufi means awareness in life, awareness on a higher plane than on which we normally live" (Friedlander, 1975, p.15). Since its inception, Sufism has existed as various schools or lineages, one of the most famous being the Order of the Whirling Dervishes which was founded in the thirteenth century.

The aim of the dervish is to open the eyes of the heart and see infinity in eternity. His goal is to loosen himself from the earth's glue which binds him and become one with God, to become a channel for His Light. (Friedlander, 1975, p.19)

As with other types of mysticism, Sufis aim to transcend their individual egos and merge their consciousness with the divine. "The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a 'traveller' ... he advances by slow 'stages' ... along a 'path' ... to the goal of union with Reality" (Nicholson, 1914/1963, p.28). This may be achieved by "chanting, singing, group movement or dance, or more interior meditations" (Smoley & Kinney, 1999, p.241). However, as with Buddhist Bodhisattvas who, although spiritually enlightened, return to normal life to assist those less advanced than themselves, Sufism advocates "the ability to function unobtrusively in daily life while maintaining the ecstatic connection with the Infinite" (p.241). Hollenback (1996) prefers the term 'recollection' rather than concentration, contemplation or meditation to describe the technique used by mystics to focus their minds and emotions in order to subdue background mental chatter. "Once mystics stop this process of silently talking to themselves, they transform their mode of consciousness and begin to have their first tangible encounters with that spiritual world that otherwise remains imperceptible to the five senses" (p.95). In Islam a popular method of recollection is *dhkir* which involves ceaselessly repeating the name of Allah like a mantra so that it eventually permeates one's whole consciousness to the exclusion of everything else. "This technique ultimately leads the Sufi to an ecstatic contemplation of God" (Hollenback, 1996, p.102). Islam acknowledges the existence of a soul within everyone that can access the spiritual realm. The human being

can rise to higher stages of perfection. His soul is different from his body. It is a spiritual substance created but not shaped. It is not bound by space and time but it is akin to the universal soul and just as the latter is a macrocosm, it is a microcosm of the universe. (Shushtery, 1980, p.69)

Sufis believe that psi abilities such as walking on water (p.135), or being unharmed by fire (p.193), frequently accompany this degree of spiritual development. *Baraka* (or *baraqa*) is the divine quality or blessing possessed by Sufi saints which "makes the performance of miracles, or *karamat* possible" (Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.113).

Islam believes in invisible spiritual beings, one category of which is the jinn who, according to the *Koran* (Dawood, 1995, p.408), are an order of intelligent beings "positioned between angels and mankind" (Druffel, 1998, p.181). Earle Waugh (1972) writes that

The roots of belief in jinn reach back into pre-Islamic times. ... They were capable of having a genealogy, and could respond to the message of Muhammad; some were destined for paradise, and others were bound for hell. They had bodies formed of vapor or flame, as opposed to man's body of clay. (Waugh, 1972, p.154)

Druffel (1998) explains that 'clay' means that "our bodies are composed from mineral chemical elements found on the earth, to which a spiritual essence called the spirit or the soul is joined during our earthly life" (p.183). Ufologist Gordon Creighton (1983) suggests that inter-dimensional entities such as the jinn may be responsible for some alien abductions. Druffel (1998) says that, while the *Koran* says that angels are made out of light, the jinn "are reportedly made of neither light nor clay, but of a substance variously translated from the Arabic as 'essential fire', 'essential flame', 'smokeless fire', or 'smokeless flame'" (p.183). Waugh (1972) explains that the jinn are supposedly able to fly, and he provides examples of their "ability to transport other people" (p.155), thus demonstrating that Islamic mysticism believes in spiritual entities who can levitate people. Leroy (1928, p.7) acknowledges that "the belief in the levitation of the ascetic is a well-established tradition" in Islamic mysticism. Both Leroy (p.7) and Charles and Jordan (1995, p.128) provide the example of the thirteenth century Persian poet and mystic Jalalu d'Din Rumi levitating. Once, when playing with some other children on the roof of a house, he was asked if it were possible to jump to the next roof. Rumi replied that it would be better to leap towards heaven and, jumping into the air, vanished from view. When the other children began crying from fear, Rumi reappeared and explained that "he had been carried away by celestial beings, who had brought him back to earth" (Leroy, 1928, p.8). Waugh provides examples of flight or levitation which he claims are the product of magical power rather than religious power. In one example, a magician attempts to demonstrate his superior powers by flying high into the air on his deerskin magic carpet, whereupon, Khawaja Mucinu'din

Chisti, a Sufi saint, sends his wooden clog into the air to beat the magician until he returns to the ground. Humiliated and defeated, the magician converts to Islam, thus possibly revealing the purpose of the story. In Waugh's (1972) opinion, this confrontation demonstrates that the Sufi saint had "control over even magical procedures in the name of God" (p.159). He explains that, according to popular belief, magical flight depends "upon the magical powers resident in man solely" (p.160), and that although "the ability to fly was not something qualitatively different than the religious ability" (p.161), its motives were not as well regarded as religious flight. As with poltergeist activity, Waugh's explanation that magic come from within and religious powers are external illustrates the confusion about the location of divine or personal PK power and reflects the apparent difference between a mystic who can levitate at will and someone who attributes it to external spiritual entities. Whether magical or divine, it seems probable that levitation derives from a transcendent source that is connected to human consciousness, but takes considerable training to bring under voluntary control.

## **2.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated that, to varying degrees, six of the groups that produce levitation reports — shamanism, poltergeist activity, Spiritualism, alien abductions, qigong practitioners and mystics — believe in the existence of a spirit realm or otherworld inhabited by various entities and powers that can facilitate psi events. Some groups focus on these beliefs more than others. For example, the typical martial arts student is probably more interested in learning how to access spiritual energies such as chi rather than communicating with spirits, but may develop such an interest if he or she becomes an advanced practitioner.

The seventh section of this chapter would, somewhat redundantly, have explained that the phenomenon of spirit possession involves a belief in spirits, but, to avoid repetition, that information has been incorporated into the next chapter which documents that the theme of spirit possession runs through most of the seven groups.

Returning to the first six groups, their descriptions of spiritual entities vary and none can empirically prove the reality of spirits, although that does not mean that they do not exist. Having noted that "The various genres of mystical literature ... repeatedly



interweave descriptions of mystical states of consciousness with accounts of miraculous powers and events" (p.17), Hollenback (1996) asks "why it is that supernormal phenomena so often accompany mystical experiences?" (p.20). This research has expanded that question to ask why it is that psi phenomena such as human levitation are reported to accompany shamanism, mysticism, Spiritualism, spirit possession, poltergeist activity, alien abductions and qigong? Perhaps all these activities can be seen as types of mystical experience. The perspective that this chapter favours is that the groups that most often produce levitation reports involve people who, consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or involuntarily, interact with a spiritual or other-dimensional realm which, as mystics appear to believe, contains energies or beings whose powers can facilitate miraculous or psi phenomena.

Although many within these groups believe that spirits cause psi events, some advanced practitioners seem to have trained themselves to levitate voluntarily, apparently without the assistance of spirits. Perhaps spirits will facilitate levitation until people have learnt how to do it themselves. The finding that some practitioners use impersonal terms such as energy or chi rather than referring to spirits raises the topic of personification or anthropomorphism and whether independent spirits actually exist. Beneficial psi events such as healing may be more likely to occur if one personifies whatever lies behind them because that helps focus one's attention, emotions and whatever psi abilities one may have. On the other hand, recalling that Spiritualists refer to 'spirit' as a universal spiritual power, and 'spirits' as individual entities, it could be misleading to assume that there is much difference between the concepts of spirits and spiritual energy. These might just be different perspectives of the same underlying phenomenon, as is illustrated by the two competing theories for poltergeist activity which put the responsibility on either spirits or unconscious PK energy from a living person. The suggestion that some aspect of the mind or consciousness survives death to become a spirit — as many of these groups believe — seems to imply that the major difference between the consciousness of a living person and the spirit of a dead one is that the former has a body and the latter does not. A more detailed reading of the beliefs of these groups suggests that the mind or consciousness of a normal living person has at least two levels; a personal one whose field of operation is limited to the confines of the body, and a universal or transpersonal level which can operate beyond the body,

but which generally lies dormant until death or unless that person undergoes enough meditative training to bring that level under conscious control. In the very few people who achieve this goal, human levitation appears to become a voluntary PK talent rather than being dependent on the whim of spirits. It seems, therefore, that an open or transpersonal model of the human mind is the best theory to resolve the internal-external conflict about the source of PK phenomena such as levitation.

## Chapter 3

## Spirit Possession

This chapter demonstrates that, in various forms, the theme of spirit possession is found in the seven selected groups, with the exception of qigong where few examples are seen. The previous chapter explains that these groups believe in spiritual realms containing entities who can not only communicate with people such as shamans and spirit mediums, but who can also cause psi phenomena such as levitation. Alternatively, some members believe that psi events are facilitated by a universal spiritual energy that flows through the consciousness of gifted or trained individuals. This raises the questions of whether consciousness is connected to a transpersonal realm inhabited by spiritual entities with psi powers, or whether spirits are personified artefacts of the mind that seem independent, or whether both ideas have some validity. Although this investigation does not seek to prove these theories, they are clearly relevant to the hypothesis-generating exercise of what causes human levitation. A spirit realm inhabited by independent entities may exist, but may also be accessible to some aspect of consciousness which is capable of generating spirits or tapping into their power. Both the transpersonal dimension of the human mind and independent spirits may therefore be capable of causing levitation. This chapter's theme of spirit possession is an extension of the discussion as to whether spirits or the mind can cause psi events. There exist several reports of people — called demoniacs within the Christian tradition, the source of many of this chapter's examples — who have levitated while supposedly possessed by spiritual entities. On the other hand, many modern researchers — some of whom deny that psi events occur during possession — assert that possession is caused by the unconscious mind. This chapter will briefly discuss these conflicting theories, as well as providing examples of levitation during various forms of spirit possession. The initial focus is on the concept of spirit possession within Christianity, followed by forms of possession within shamanism, poltergeist activity, Spiritualism, alien abductions, martial arts and mysticism.

It is only for convenience that people who experience spirit possession are referred to as a group. In a religious context, possession is rare and controversial, and those who experience it cannot be defined as a group in the same sense as, for example, shamans, alien abductees, or Spiritualists. While they may share religious beliefs, it is unlikely that people who have experienced possession would meet for any

purpose. Definitions of spirit possession vary and within, for example, the Christian tradition, such people are generally regarded as involuntary victims of an unfortunate experience. There are also cases where spirit possession and poltergeist activity appear to overlap. Vincent Crapanzano broadly defines spirit possession as

any altered or unusual state of consciousness and allied behaviour that is indigenously understood in terms of the influence of an alien spirit, demon, or deity. The possessed act as though another personality — a spirit or soul — has entered their body and taken control. Dramatic changes in their physiognomy, voice, and manner usually occur. Their behaviour often is grotesque and blasphemous. (Crapanzano, 1987, p.12)

It is ironic that this definition uses the term 'alien' spirit because, although Crapanzano would probably define the word as meaning 'foreign', in recent years some people have suggested that alien abductions are a form of spirit possession. Klimo (1991, p.182) defines possession as a phenomenon "in which lower astral spirits are said to infiltrate the physical/emotional/mental system of a human being. Their aim is to gain control of a human nervous system so that they can resume some form of physical existence". In New Age parlance the astral realm refers to a spirit realm that interpenetrates physical reality and which may be accessed during out-of-body experiences (OBEs). Guiley (1989, p.324) makes a distinction between demonic and spirit possession. "Unlike demonic possession, in which a person is taken over by devils or evil spirits for harm, spirit possession is a voluntary, culturally sanctioned displacement of personality". However, it is almost impossible to distinguish clearly between good and bad spirits. The spectrum of opinions about interacting with, or receiving information from, psi sources ranges from the assertion that these are mental disorders through to the religious belief that, unless they are divinely inspired, they are the work of demonic spiritual entities. Some psychologists, especially those adopting a Jungian perspective, have concluded that, because psychological evidence has demonstrated that the mind can sometimes split into different personalities, people such as spirit mediums, shamans, abductees, religious ecstasies and demoniacs are actually talking to another part of themselves rather than independent spiritual entities. As Klimo (1991, p.182) writes, "part of the person's own mind splits off and then seems to turn around and possess him or her". Although this may occur occasionally, researchers who assert that it is true in all cases appear to be ignoring psi evidence that does not seem to fit their theories.

Oesterreich's (1921/1966) study of possession epitomises this scepticism. In his Introduction, Anita Gregory explains that Oesterreich believes that possession

is really one and the same person masquerading at times ... as a devil and talking to himself, and that it is part of the pathological process for the sufferer to be deluded as to the identity of the second person. (in Oesterreich, 1921/1966, p.viii)

Oesterreich avoids discussing psi events in the cases he reviews, although he does admit that some mediums seem to possess clairvoyant abilities. In his "Appendix on Parapsychology" he acknowledges that "accounts of parapsychic phenomena in possession are quite common" (p.382), but suggests that, in the absence of supporting scientific evidence, they may be the result of "inaccurate accounts," which is a weak justification for disregarding evidence that contradicts his preconceptions. Normally a lack of research into an anomalous phenomenon is an incentive to look at the matter more closely rather than ignoring it. Oesterreich does not mention the well-documented Françoise Fontaine (see Leroy, 1928, p.13) possession case, probably because it involves several instances of levitation. Such biases still exist in modern works; for example, Pickering's (1998, p.199) dictionary of witchcraft does not mention Fontaine levitating. A similar approach is taken by Dr William Sargant (1976, p.234) who claims that all forms of possession are caused by the same physiological processes, but does not discuss the psi events that often accompany them. On the other hand, the psychologist Stan Gooch (1984, p.222) acknowledges the existence of psi phenomena, but concludes that although "incubi, succubi and poltergeists are real ... these phenomena are aspects of the human mind, not independent supernatural entities". Gooch (1984, p.231) further claims that "religionists through the ages have assigned the matters under discussion to the activities of spirits, demons, devils, gods, angels and ghosts. This total error has effectively prevented any useful or meaningful investigation of the area in question". One problem with claiming that spirits are mental creations is that we do not have a clear understanding of where the boundaries of the mind lie. If consciousness can transcend the physical brain then surely the domains of mentally created and independent spirits would overlap each other, making it almost impossible to differentiate between them.

A medical explanation for some possession cases is Tourette's syndrome, which is "a rare neurological disorder whose symptoms range from facial tics to astonishing verbal outbursts, from barks and screams to uncontrollable swearing" (Dash, 1997,

p.373). Tourette's sufferers often "feel that some invisible entity is dictating these bizarre patterns of behaviour" (p.373). This theory fails to explain psi events, and claiming that certain behaviours are sometimes caused by a neurological disorder does not exclude the possibility that spirits may have caused that disorder.

A sociological approach to spirit possession is illustrated by the historian Darren Oldridge (2000) who claims that "both the possessed and their spiritual doctors were acting out socially determined roles" (p.114), and that "the experience of possession provided an occasion for relatively disempowered individuals to address their social betters from a position of lofty, if precarious authority" (p.119). Oldridge believes that those who were not faking their possession symptoms may have been suffering from ailments such as epilepsy (p.119). It is possible that some historical demoniacs were adopting a social role that permitted them to "speak the unspeakable" (p.120), but Oldridge neglects to explain the psi symptoms that are occasionally reported to accompany the possession syndrome, which suggests that his interpretation of at least some cases is inadequate. A more balanced approach is adopted by the sociologist-anthropologist Michael Cuneo (2002), who claims to have witnessed more than fifty exorcisms and acknowledges that, although he did not see any psi phenomena, he cannot prove that demons do not exist (p.329). He asserts that modern exorcisms have a powerful placebo effect, and that for many people "it's simply a cop-out or a means of self-glamorization. They want to avoid responsibility for their own shortcomings by blaming them on demons" (p.334). It is understandable that many researchers claim that possession symptoms are produced by the mind rather than by spiritual entities. Science has shown that the mind can suffer from various illnesses, illusions and social pressures, whereas the existence of spirits is generally regarded as unproven, but researchers who ignore the psi aspects of possession cases appear to be adopting an incomplete explanation for the workings of human consciousness.

The traditional Christian perspective on spirit possession is exemplified by Gabriele Amorth (1999) who has worked for many years as the chief exorcist in Rome and is the honorary President of the International Association of Exorcists. Amorth's writing is emotional and unscholarly, but the apparent popularity of his book suggests that it reflect the beliefs of many Catholics. Although he admits that the Church's *Ritual* confines the use of exorcisms only to instances of true possession" (p.35), Amorth describes examples of possession where the symptoms seem to be

little more than aches and pains or depression. He acknowledges that "in the most difficult cases we are faced with individuals who are afflicted both by evil influence and psychological disturbances" (p.47), thus requiring the assistance of a psychiatrist. Amorth (1999, p.169) claims that out of the thirty thousand people he has treated, only ninety-three were truly possessed. In some cases he notes a few psi symptoms, but does not mention any examples of levitation, although in one case he describes a possessed girl who, when put on a table, "would twist and turn and fall to the ground, but at the last moment, before hitting the floor, she slowed down, as though a hand was holding her up, and would never hurt herself" (p.74).

The Anna Ecklund case illustrates that levitation does occur in some instances of possession. Ecklund was born in America in around 1882 and first began to show symptoms of possession when she was fourteen. She was exorcised in 1912, but later become possessed again after her father supposedly cursed her (Guiley, 1989, p.110). In 1928 another exorcism was attempted and as the ritual began, Ecklund, who was being held down on the bed by several nuns, broke free and flew through the air to the wall high above the doorway (Nicola, 1974, p.127; Wilson, 1994, p.353). "She stuck there as if glued and finally had to be wrenched down" (Rogo, 1991, p.44). The exorcism lasted 23 days during which time Ecklund displayed numerous other symptoms, including excessive gravitation.

In a second example, both Leroy (1928, p.17) and Rogo (1991, p.46) quote from a report to his superiors in France by a Christian missionary who had travelled to Indochina in 1738 and seemed prepared to experiment with levitation.

While engaged in my exorcism, I suddenly had the idea to ask the Devil in Latin to move the possessed to the ceiling of the church. Specifically, this was to be done with feet upwards and head pointing down. Immediately the body became rigid, and the possessed was unable to use his limbs. He was propelled to a pillar in the middle of the church and, with his feet close together, pushed with his back toward the pillar. All this occurred while his hands remained out of use. He was transported to the ceiling, much like a weight that is forcibly pulled upward. Throughout all this, the man remained seemingly passive. He hung from the ceiling, his feet flat up against it, his head downwards. ... I kept him, in this manner, up in the air for more than half an hour, but I did not have the persistence to leave him there any longer. I was, in any event, very frightened by what I had observed. I ordered the Devil to put the possessed back on his feet without any damage whatever. ... He immediately tossed him down, like a package of laundry, completely unharmed. (in Rogo, 1991, p.46)

In religious cases such as these there appears to be little effort to deny that psi phenomena such as levitation do occur, although this may be because Christian authorities wish their followers to be fearful of demonic forces. Although the Church acknowledges that psychological causes need to be eliminated before exorcism is attempted, it adopts an unscientific and fearful approach to possession by dogmatically asserting that demonic entities are responsible without providing any conclusive empirical evidence or considering other possibilities. No convincing reason is provided to explain why some people become possessed and not others. For example, during his interview, the Catholic pastor Philip claims that "God permits Satan to possess certain people" probably because "people open themselves to it firstly by rejecting God, and secondly by pursuing a pathway that will lead towards more and more evil practices". However, if a child becomes possessed, Philip believes that

there's no possible way that such a child can deserve demonic possession. ... They're the example of an innocent person being possessed. ... But God has permitted that to happen ... perhaps ... so that people in the area can see how evil works or how evil is, so that people ... can see the work of the exorcist in getting rid of that.

The *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (Aumann, 2003) adopts a slightly more open-minded approach by admitting that some levitations may be caused by a natural force: "The three possible causes of levitations are God (directly or through the agency of angels), the devil (with God's permission), or some force or power of nature as yet unknown". A more rational approach would be to suspend judgement until further research is done, such as investigating any behavioural or psychological similarities between Christian demoniacs, because it is possible that all levitations are caused by a natural PK force.

The psychologist Marc Cramer (1979, p.11) offers what he describes as a new interpretation of spirit possession. Adopting a largely Jungian approach, he defines "demoniacal possession as an unconscious and parapsychological phenomenon of extraordinary intensity which may be understood as a universal, timeless phenomenon directly related to the balance of psychological forces and tensions in collective, transpersonal psyche" (p.11). Cramer claims that "clerical explanations of possession phenomena are only credible if one already accepts the unprovable teachings upon which they are based" (p.10). In his opinion, claiming that possession is caused by demons or evil spirits "explains nothing since it merely



substitutes one ambiguity for another" (p.10). He asks what demons or spirits are and how and why they would want to take over a person's body. He asserts that

the overwhelming majority of cases brought before the exorcist, anthropologist, mental science researcher or shaman are either hysterias, psychotic manifestations or outright frauds. Genuine cases of archetypal possession are exceedingly rare and may be *mimicked* by the many pseudo-possession upon which most psychiatrists base their knowledge. ... My position is that the possession syndrome ... stands apart from possession-like hysterias, religious delusions and mythomania as a separate and unique variety of mental disorder which belongs in a category of its own and is not directly related to other forms of psychopathology as it is currently understood. (Cramer, 1979, p.12)

To help distinguish genuine instances of the possession syndrome, Cramer explains that the symptoms must satisfy behavioural, physiological and paranormal criteria (p.21). Cases that lack psi symptoms are, in his opinion, not genuine. "Classical demoniacal possession, albeit exceedingly rare, is both a psychopathological and a parapsychological phenomenon of extraordinary, if not unique, intensity" (p.253). However, while acknowledging that human levitation may be possible, Cramer asserts that there is "no acceptable evidence" to support the contention that any cases of levitation have ever occurred during spirit possession (p.29). In what seems to be an illogical distinction, Cramer is prepared to accept reports of other psi events during possession cases but not levitation.

In an apparent attempt to prove his point, Cramer claims that reports of the possessed young Bantu girl, Germana Cèle, who is said to have levitated on several occasions in Natal, Africa, in 1907, are unreliable. The case is described in several books. Rogo (1991) reports that her possession supposedly started after her first communion. Visitors and residents of the mission were amazed at her capacity to levitate. She was seen levitating in church by members of the congregation who attempted unsuccessfully to pull her down by the feet (p.45). "On one occasion the girl levitated six feet [1.83 m] over her bed during the reading of the rituals and then challenged the exorcist to join her!" (p.45). If sprinkled with holy water while levitating she would resume her position on the bed (Rogo, 1991, p.45).

Sometimes she levitated vertically and sometimes horizontally, but it was observed that her clothing would cling to her body rather than hanging down as expected (p.45). Rogo (1991) and Gordon (1996) acknowledge that they obtained details of the case from Adolf Rodewyk's book *Possessed by Satan* (1975). Cramer claims that Léon Cristiani (1974) is the source of much of the information about this case,

but that he got the data from an earlier book by François Gaquère who "drew his information from secondary sources" (p.243), whom Cramer does not name. Cramer claims that a more reliable source is the Jesuit C.M. de Heredra (1922) whose book contains a lengthy quotation (p.114) from Delalle, the then vicar-apostolic of Natal, who conducted the girl's final exorcism. For several months Delalle had received reports of two possessed girls on the St Michael's mission. He eventually gave permission for the priest in charge to exorcise the girls, but their possession symptoms recommenced. Delalle then travelled to the mission and questioned the priests and sisters. They reported that the sixteen-year-old girls could carry enormous weights, sometimes spoke Latin, seemed to be telepathic and that a few days previously Germana's dress and bed had spontaneously burst into flames. In addition, they reported that "sometimes they [the girls] are lifted off the ground in spite of the Sisters holding them" (in Heredra, 1922, p.116). Satisfied that she was possessed, Delalle began to exorcise Germana.

Cramer (1979, p.244) claims that being "lifted off the ground" does not refer to levitation but to "hypermotor activity during the girls' fits" and concludes that, because Delalle himself does not mention seeing Germana levitate, reports in other books that she levitated must be incorrect. In his determination to show that levitation does not occur during spirit possession Cramer reveals a certain lack of logic. The failure of Delalle's report to mention Germana levitating does not prove that she did not, nor does it discredit reports that do mention her levitating. The sisters' reference to 'lifting off the ground' might well refer to levitation. Delalle was only at the mission for a short time, and Cramer is ignoring the possibility that many of the people there — priests, sisters, mission residents and visitors — during the several months that she was supposedly possessed and also during her first exorcism, may have seen her levitate and given evidence to that effect. Cramer's credibility about levitation reports is further challenged by the fact that while disputing the accuracy of Cristiani's reference to Germana levitating, he neglects to mention that Cristiani's book (1974) contains several other well-documented cases of levitating demoniacs.

Other literary evidence also contradicts Cramer's claim that levitation is never a feature of the possession syndrome. A well-documented historical case is that of Françoise Fontaine from Louviers in France, who was exorcised in 1591. The

official report of the case was found in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (Leroy, 1928, p.13), because the levitation occurred in a courthouse "in the presence of Provost Morel, his clerk and other persons" (p.13). In the courtroom, Fontaine was seen to levitate about two feet [61 cm] into the air and then fall backwards before being dragged head-first along the ground by an invisible force. As the Provost started reading aloud the Gospel of St John, the possessed girl, "who was stretched on her back on the floor, was raised three or four feet [0.9-1.2 m] above the ground, and thus carried horizontally towards the extempore exorcist, who was so horrified that he fled incontinently into his office" (Leroy, 1928, p.14). Still floating on her back, Fontaine followed the Provost and his staff up the corridor to their office where the soles of her feet banged against their locked door. According to other witnesses, she then floated headfirst back through the courtroom and into the passageway causing "the gaoler, his servants, our archers and many prisoners who were present with several inhabitants of Louviers" to flee either into the prison or into the street, locking the girl inside (p.14). Fontaine's levitations did not end there. In church, as the curé Pellet attempted to give her the Sacrament, she levitated and was pulled to the ground by several people who grabbed her dress. At the third attempt to give her Communion, and also when they tried to shave her head, she levitated "high into the air with her head downwards and her feet upwards, without her clothes being upset" (pp.15-16). Leroy (1928, p.13) quotes other examples of demoniacs levitating with their feet upwards, whose clothes did not hang down. As with the Bantu girl in Natal, one can ask why an apparently evil possessing entity would maintain a demoniac's modesty while upside-down.

It is possible, as Cramer (1979) suggests, that all reports of levitation during spirit possession are fictitious or exaggerated, but the detailed evidence and numerous witnesses suggest that he is wrong. Cramer is challenging historical and scientific prejudices by acknowledging that psi events are a part of the possession syndrome. For example, he claims that "there is no real mention of psi, or even of its possibility, in any anthropological study of possession I have ever read" (1979, p.224). However, by asserting that spirits and levitation are not involved in possession cases, Cramer is being almost as prejudiced as those he criticises. This may be to avoid alienating his psychology peers, because mainstream science — including many parapsychologists — still regards macro-PK phenomena such as levitation as highly dubious.

### 3.1 Shamanism

The purpose of this section is to show that spirit possession is an integral part of shamanism, although in indigenous societies it is viewed in a more positive light than in Christianity. Anthropologists have categorised spirit possession in a number of ways. I.M. Lewis defines spirit possession as

an invasion of the individual by a spirit. It is not for us to judge who is and who is not really 'possessed'. If someone is, in his own cultural milieu, generally considered to be in a state of spirit possession, then he (or she) is possessed. (Lewis, 1971, p.46)

Lewis (1971) refers to 'central' possession, which an indigenous society may value because it supports local cultural values, and 'peripheral' possession, which may be seen as undesirable because it does not. Crapanzano (1987, p.12) adopts anthropologist Raymond Firth's three categories which are 'spirit possession', 'spirit mediumship' and 'shamanism'. Spirit possession is defined as "phenomena of abnormal behaviour which are interpreted by other members of the society as evidence that a spirit is controlling the person's actions and probably inhabiting his body". Spirit mediumship involves the "use of such behaviour by members of the society as a means of communication with what they understand to be entities in the spirit world," and shamanism refers "to those phenomena where a person, either a spirit medium or not, is regarded as controlling spirits, exercising his mastery over them in a socially recognised way" (Firth, 1967, p.296). These categories demonstrate that interacting with spirits is central to shamanism because, unlike the Christian approach, the psi powers such as healing and clairvoyance that spirits appear to bestow on shamans are a valued resource in indigenous societies.

In a traditional shamanic initiation experience, whether sought after or unforeseen, neophytes may find that initially they have little or no control over what is happening to them, which might lead some to describe these as possession experiences. As Vitebsky (1995) explains, "Shamanic power depends on keeping control over the trance state" (p.22). The difference between an inappropriate possession state and that of the typical shaman appears to be whether the spirits or the person in the trance is in charge. Shamans' initiation experiences teach them to gain access to the spirit realm at will so that later they can summon spirit helpers to assist them in various tasks. But some spirits are more powerful than others and it is not possible for every shaman to be in complete control all the time. Vitebsky (1995, p.148)

writes that sometimes "the shaman's degree of control appears only partial, as the relation with spirits is a tempestuous and stressful one". Joan Halifax explains that

The relationship of the shaman with the spirit realm is complex and varied. In some cultures, one class of spirit is regarded as evil, another class is believed to be helpful. In other cultures, the spirits that dismember the shaman ultimately become allies. Some spirits tutor; others obstruct. The acquisition of spirits for most shamans is essential to the effective practice of this art. Spirits can possess the shaman or sing, as ally, in the near proximity. (Halifax, 1982, p.74)

To explain the delicate balance between being involuntarily or voluntarily possessed by spirits, Eliade comments that

It will easily be seen wherein a shaman differs from a 'possessed' person, for example; the shaman controls his 'spirits', in the sense that he, a human being, is able to communicate with the dead, 'demons', and 'nature spirits', without thereby becoming their instrument. To be sure, shamans are sometimes found to be 'possessed', but these are exceptional cases for which there is a particular explanation. (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.6)

Eliade discriminates between the types of spirit that shamans may encounter.

We must distinguish carefully between familiar spirits proper and another more powerful category of spirits known as tutelary spirits; so too, a distinction must be made between these last and the divine or semidivine beings whom the shamans summon up during séances. A shaman is a man who has immediate, concrete experience with gods and spirits; he sees them face to face, he talks with them, prays to them, implores them – but he does not 'control' more than a limited number of them. (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.88)

Sometimes a shaman may conduct a séance where spirits are invited to reveal their presence. The resulting psi events may be reminiscent of poltergeist activity or spirit possession. Kalweit (1992) recounts how in 1879 the explorer Sir Cecil Denny visited a Blackfoot camp in Alberta. With a translator, Denny entered the tent of the medicine man, who ignored them and continued smoking his pipe. After a while the tepee started shaking and lifting, so Denny went outside, only to find that there was no one there. When he returned, the tepee "began to move even more wildly, rocking back and forth, and it rose several feet off the ground, so that it was possible to see outside. The two men were overcome by fear, but their host did not budge" (p.156). The difference between these events and the paranormal chaos that so often occurs in poltergeist or possession cases is that the shaman can deliberately invite spirits to manifest their powers and can generally stop them at will. As Harner writes

The main difference between an ordinary person and a shaman with regard to their guardian spirits is that the shaman uses his guardian spirits actively when in an altered state of consciousness. The shaman frequently sees and consults with his guardian spirit, travels with it on the shamanic journey, has it help him, and uses it to help others to recover from illness and injury. (Harner, 1990, p.43)

Kalweit (1992, p.155) reports how in eastern Greenland the *angakoks* (shamans) traditionally hold their séances in igloos. They are tied up with their drums next to them, and the spectators sit around on the sleeping ledges. The arrival of the spirits may be heralded by the drum appearing to play itself.

The spirit enters the *angakok*. ... He feels that he is sinking into the earth. From this moment on, either the spirit speaks through the mouth of the shaman or the shaman himself speaks. That is to say, there is only one soul at a time in his body. (Kalweit, 1992, p.155)

These examples illustrate that shamans are capable of using their consciousness or will-power to harness, direct, or cease what appears to be the psi power of spirits; like Spiritualists they may even let the spirits speak through them, whereas the typical Christian demoniac seems to be involuntarily possessed by spiritual entities and cannot control them. This shows how differently spirits and psi powers can be viewed. Shamanism values and encourages such interactions, whereas the traditional Christian approach is to avoid or demonise them.

### **3.2 Poltergeist Activity**

Because poltergeist researcher William Roll (1976, p.11) believes that ESP and PK reports suggest that "the human self extends into the environment in ways that have not so far been brought out by science," he regards poltergeist phenomena as "not about spirits, demons, or ghosts but about human personality". There are others, however, who believe that spirits are sometimes involved in poltergeist activity. Gauld and Cornell (1979, p.227) discovered that out of the 500 poltergeist cases that they studied only 3% involved possession or obsession. Exorcism worked in 7% of the 500 cases, it failed in 3% and was "transiently successful" in 2% (p.228). What happened in the remaining 88% of cases is not explained, but one might speculate that exorcism was not considered, perhaps because no one seemed to be possessed or was clearly identified as the focus of the activity.

Cramer (1979, p.244) says that occasionally it is hard to differentiate between spirit possession and poltergeist activity because in some cases the syndromes appear to

overlap. Rogo (1990) concludes that the major difference between poltergeist cases and poltergeist-possession cases is that genuinely possessed people often display two symptoms not found in poltergeist cases: "(1) the ability to speak or understand languages never previously studied and (2) frequent levitations" (p.221). Rogo also suggests that if poltergeist symptoms break out first, it is possible that, as a result of their religious beliefs, the victims then convince themselves that they are possessed (p.219). Owen (1964, p.216) asserts that "among good poltergeist cases there are practically no instances of clear-cut levitation" but acknowledges that people may sometimes be thrown, pushed, or pulled, which he refers to as "traction of the human body" (p.194). Regardless of what one calls it, the evidence reveals that people are occasionally lifted into the air by an invisible force when in the grip of either syndrome, but more frequently in possession cases, and there is an ongoing dispute as to whether these psi events are caused by spirits, human consciousness, or both.

The case of Theobold, aged nine, and Joseph Burner, aged seven, from Illfurth in Alsace, France, contains symptoms of poltergeist activity and possession. The boys first began displaying strange behaviour in 1865, but did not undergo allegedly successful exorcisms until 1869. During that time, numerous witnesses observed possession symptoms, such as their bodies being bent backwards, vomiting quantities of foul material and entangling their legs so tightly they could not be separated (Guiley, 1989, p.39). Their bed would sometimes rise into the air while they were in it and "Sometimes their mother, seated on the bed while it rose off the floor, would be thrown into the corner" (p.39). Poltergeist-like symptoms that occurred were that their room would get unnaturally hot, the furniture and curtains would move around, the windows would fly open and the house would shake (p.39). At Theobold's final exorcism, before several witnesses,

The armchair, with the boy on it, was seen to rise into the air although three strong men struggled to keep it on the floor. The child foamed at the mouth and screamed in a violent rage as the men who attempted to control him and the levitating chair were thrown and tossed from side to side. When the disturbances ceased and the chair returned to the ground the exorcisms began. (Cramer, 1979, p.245)

Although the Burner boys displayed many of the usual symptoms of spirit possession, Cramer contends (p.246) that being on a chair that rises into the air is symptomatic of poltergeist activity and therefore cannot be called human levitation.

Without questioning Cramer's terminology, it seems likely that the same force levitates chairs, beds and people.

Stuart Gordon (1996) reports a similar poltergeist-possession case of the thirteen-year-old Lutheran boy called 'Roland Doe' which began in January 1949 in Georgetown, USA. Paintings rattled, objects vanished only to reappear elsewhere, furniture moved and strange knocking and scratching noises were heard in the house. Although initially symptomatic of poltergeist activity, the case worsened when the family rushed into his bedroom one night to find the screaming boy and his mattress suspended in mid-air (Gordon, 1996, p.182; Nicola, 1974, p.109). This recurred even when Roland was moved to other houses. "The boy suffered spasms, and bounced up and down on his bed as though controlled by puppet strings. Full levitations were interspersed with these unnatural events" (Rogo, 1990, p.211). The exorcism took place in a Catholic hospital in St Louis. Gordon (1996, p.183) reports that, "Fighting his handlers with amazing strength, Roland ... read the exorcists' minds and understood the ritual Latin they spoke. In each session the room grew ice-cold; sometimes he levitated". A witness describes how

One night the boy brushed off his handlers and soared through the air at Father Bowdern standing some distance from his bed [with] the ritual in his hands. Presumably, Father was about to be attacked but the boy got no further than the book. And when his hand hit that ... he didn't tear the book, he dissolved it. The book vaporized into confetti and fell in small pieces to the floor. (in Erdman, 1975, p.55)

Another example of poltergeist-possession is that of Hélène Poirier (1834-1914), a laundress in the French parish of Coullons. Canon Champault, for whom she worked for many years, provides most of the evidence (in Cristiani, 1974, p.104). Poirier was possessed "at least twice over a period of six years, and in each case was exorcised" (p.105). For hours witnesses observed the curtains around her bed shaking and the curtain rings rattling backwards and forwards. She was thrown to the ground and suffered slaps, kicks and strangulation attempts by invisible forces that left marks all over her body for weeks.

There were numerous instances of levitation: in each case Helene was seized by the hair, *always by some invisible power*, pulled around the room, lifted from the ground and finally thrown, in a half-strangled state, upon her bed. Once she was suddenly seized by the head and transported over the neighbouring houses, a distance of some forty-five yards [41 m]. (Cristiani, 1974, p.105)



With the Enfield poltergeist (Playfair, 1980) only a few of the symptoms seem like possession. Janet, the young girl at the centre of the case, was sometimes terrified, intrigued, or amused by the bizarre happenings in the house. For much of the time she continued to attend school; sometimes she lapsed into a violent trance and started to behave as if possessed (Playfair, 1980, p.103), but seemed to be cured when some Brazilian Spiritualists visited the house and commanded whatever was possessing her to leave (p.110). Another of Janet's possession symptoms is that a laryngograph experiment revealed that the audible voices of the spirits supposedly causing the poltergeist activity were generated within her throat (Playfair, 1980, p.228). Janet may have been deliberately or unconsciously faking the spirit voices, but Playfair believes that the Voice was genuinely speaking through her. He acknowledges that it is not possible to prove the matter either way, although the Voice was considerably deeper and had a completely different wave-form to Janet's normal voice. During traditional exorcisms, demonic entities are reported to speak through the possessed person's mouth in different voices. It was suggested to Playfair that Janet was an unconscious spirit medium who had not yet learnt to control her talent. This is reminiscent of both shamanism and Spiritualism, and may explain other poltergeist cases.

The evidence reveals that in most poltergeist cases there are few overt symptoms of possession, but that sometimes they do develop. Given that the competing theories about spirit possession and poltergeist activity are the same — that they are caused by spirits, the unconscious mind or a mixture of the two — researchers in both fields are probably not surprised that the symptoms occasionally overlap. In fact, they might wonder why they do not intermingle more often.

### **3.3 Spiritualism**

The purpose of this section is to show that Spiritualism often contains a form of spirit possession. At séances mediums deliberately seek contact with the spirits of departed people. Some mediums only receive clairvoyant information from spirits, while others enter a trance or meditative state to permit spirits to speak through them. In these cases the medium's voice and sometimes facial expressions may resemble that of the dead person, which can be regarded as voluntary spirit possession. Physical mediums may request spirits to produce psi phenomena, such as appports or levitations, as evidence of their existence, but sometimes these events occur unexpectedly. The English novelist Florence Marryat (1837-1899),

who regularly participated in séances with the most popular mediums of her time, describes an unexpected incident at the house of Mrs Guppy, a well-known physical medium. There were many guests in two adjoining, illuminated drawing rooms (Marryat, 1891/1973, p.138). Not wishing to participate in the second of two séances, Mrs Guppy, who was a very stout woman, moved into the back drawing room with some of the guests.

Suddenly, however, she was levitated and carried in the sight of all of us into the midst of our circle. As she felt herself rising in the air, she called out, 'Don't let go hands for Heaven's sake'. We were standing in a ring, and I had hold of the hand of Prince Albert of Solms. As Mrs Guppy came sailing over our heads, her feet caught his neck and mine, and in our anxiety to do as she had told us, we gripped tight hold of each other, and were thrown forward on our knees by the force with which she was carried past us into the centre. ... The influence that levitated her, moreover, placed her on a chair with such a bump that it broke the two front legs off. (Marryat, 1891/1973, p.139)

Mrs Guppy may have been concerned that she would have fallen more abruptly if the witnesses had stopped holding hands. This incident cannot be described as full possession, but it is reminiscent of poltergeist activity and illustrates that unexpected and seemingly uncontrollable psi events may occur to some mediums.

Although numerous Spiritualists claim to be Christians, the Christian Church disapproves of attempts to contact spirits of the dead. The English Christian Exorcism Study Group describes organized Spiritualism as "a cult based on a somewhat credulous approach to highly selective aspects of paranormal phenomena" (Perry, 1987, p.46). They claim that messages relayed by a spirit medium may be generated within the medium's mind or picked up telepathically from the sitter,

or they may be from discarnate sources. ... A person who lays herself open to any stray psychic influences ... may not always find herself becoming the mouthpiece of entirely good forces. Christians should be wary of any person who claims to be 'controlled' by any spirit other than the Holy Spirit of God, and they should constantly test the spirits to see whether they are wholesome or baneful. (Perry, 1987, p.49)

A similar religious bias is to be found in Leroy's 1928 book on levitation in which he reviews numerous cases from within and outside the Christian tradition, but some of his conclusions are not solely the product of his data. In his opinion, unless they are fraudulent, Spiritualist levitations require a preternatural rather than a miraculous explanation. He asserts that because "nothing but an intelligence is able to produce intelligent phenomena" (p.245), the entities that levitate mediums

cannot be disembodied souls, because the spirits of the dead are unable — unless through a miracle — to have intercourse with the world of the living and to move matter. Hence the levitation of the mediums, whenever it is not a cheat, is a diabolical achievement. (Leroy, 1928, p.245)

Leroy does not explain why spirits of the dead cannot facilitate psi events while diabolical forces can. One of his conclusions about human levitation is that

Traditional Catholic theology does not admit a natural cause for levitation. ... It regards it as a divine marvel or a diabolic trickery. The levitation of demoniacs or mediums is a parody, dismal or ludicrous, of the charisma of its saints. (Leroy, 1928, p.251)

It is only supposition to claim that all psi phenomena are either divine or diabolical. People who perpetuate such beliefs should instead be advocating empirical research into these matters. This sort of theological bias helps explain why the medium Home was ordered to leave Rome in 1864 on the grounds of sorcery (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.173).

Most of the Christian priests and pastors that I interviewed gave almost identical answers when asked for their opinions about Spiritualism. For example, Brian believes that spirit mediums or channellers may be opening themselves up to evil forces and if a medium levitates "the power is coming from the devil rather than from God". Similarly, Philip believes that if a medium levitates

I would suggest that Satan is at work ... and that Satan is able ... to perform duplicate miracles for those who choose to be deceived. In the Christian faith, the work of ... trying to communicate with spirits is considered an evil work in itself.

On the other hand, Brendan, who has studied Eastern religions as well as being a Catholic priest, believes that if someone levitates "it all comes into the same area of psychic phenomenon" and that the suggestion that God levitates some people while the devil levitates others is "a lot of hogwash". He points out that "the mind is capable of doing anything" but that psi events are "not essential to the spiritual journey or the journey to enlightenment". Brendan does believe in demonic forces but points out that if only one God exists then all other entities are "manifestations of some aspect of the Ground of Being". In his opinion, exorcism is "a religious ritual, [that] has a lot more to do with ... psychic healing".

Spiritualists are more tolerant than the Christian Church about communicating with spirits, but are aware that a person's motives or character may dictate the outcome. Michael Bentine (1981), whose parents were Spiritualists, describes a case of

possession witnessed by his father who, as a scientist, was interested in researching the paranormal. The man concerned was a publican who had a remarkable talent for predicting racing winners. To enhance his abilities, he started holding séances and was soon completely under the control of a spirit called 'Old Pal' (p.84). At his wife's request a Spiritualist 'Rescue Circle' was assembled. The publican lapsed into a trance, the room became icy cold, he dribbled a foul liquid, his face swelled up and he became abusive. The determination of the circle members eventually prevailed and the entity departed. The grateful publican promised to abandon his previous ways, but his customers and vanity soon got the better of him. As Bentine writes "He died, raving mad, in the padded cell of a violent ward in a Kent mental hospital" (1981, p.88). The Rescue Circle could be seen as a form of exorcism, although Bentine describes it as a "group therapy of a specialized kind" (p.85). Bentine also describes how, at a séance with some trusted friends of his parents, his mother, a scrupulously honest and stout lady of eleven stone (70 kg), claims to have just imagined how exciting it would be to experience something like levitation when she suddenly found herself being whisked out of her chair, over the top of the séance table, and onto the lap of another sitter. Bentine (1976, p.55) claims that it would have been difficult for her to have walked around the table without being heard or bumping into something in the séance darkness. This cannot be described as an example of possession, but it seems to illustrate that whatever caused the involuntary levitation was linked to or capable of reading her thoughts.

Whether possession is caused by spirits or the unconscious mind, one would expect Spiritualists to produce more cases of involuntary possession than other groups because of their frequent attempts to communicate with otherworld entities. However, the literature on possession does not appear to contain any statistics to support this suggestion. During my interviews with Spiritualists, they were asked what they thought caused, and how one might prevent, spirit possession. Most of them explained that the fear of demonic entities was exaggerated, and that Spiritualists generally take steps to ensure that the spirits they contact are of a pleasant or higher nature. Oliver explains that "We always ask one question when a spirit comes to us; do they come in the light of Christ? ... If we don't get any answer, then we do not make that communication". Barbara claims that people are possessed by their minds rather than spirits: "We do not believe another spirit entity can control you and possess your body". She also claims that poltergeist activity is

"created by the person's own mind, their own fear" and can require "psychological help". Most mediums claim to have a guardian spirit, guide or 'door keeper' who vets the spirits seeking to communicate with or through them. Maude, who has levitated several times during circles, points out that as a Christian medium she is devoted to serving others. "You pray to God for protection and you ask that angels or beings of light ... will help you to raise your consciousness for the purpose of this service". Maude says that her guardian angel was present on occasions when "another entity has entered my body and spoken through it". She points out that

I'm very careful that I don't let any old person in. I've got what I call a guiding structure that protects me on every level. ... But if they bring someone through what I call my door keeper, then I will allow that.

Edward, who claims to have worked with spirits for about sixty years, says that

You'll hear some people say that a deep trance-medium must move out of his body, over there, while another person comes in. This is completely and utterly wrong. It's a simple matter of shifting minds. ... And you as a medium will say 'yes' or 'no' if you are asked from spirit 'will you let me come and speak through your voice-box?'. You either give it permission or you don't.

Edward believes that possession cannot occur for any length of time, and is just "a state of mind that that person has put themselves into". He claims that "all of us have got what we call a doorkeeper. ... That spirit person attached themselves to you at birth and he's there for the sole reason of protecting you against the unwanted, the unneeded".

Parapsychologists Dr Loftur Gissurarson and Professor Erlendur Haraldsson describe the investigations made by members of the Experimental Society in Reykjavik, Iceland, into the psi phenomena surrounding the medium Indridi Indridason (1883-1912). Initially Indridason's séances were held in the houses of Society members where sometimes he levitated so high that he hit his head on the ceiling and later complained about pains in the head. The séance darkness made visibility difficult, but the noise when he "crashed down on the floor, resulted in complaints from neighbours, and at least twice the Society had to find another flat to hold their séances" (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1995, p.61). What happened to Indridason on several occasions would be better described as poltergeist activity or even possession. Brynjolfur Thorláksson describes how, during one eventful night, he ran into Indridason's bedroom after hearing him scream for help.

But then I see a picture that I shall never forget. Indridi is lying in the air in a horizontal position, at about the height of my chest, and swaying there to and fro, with his feet pointing towards the window, and it

seems to me that the invisible power that is holding him in the air is trying to swing him out of the window. I don't hesitate a moment, but grab the medium, and push him down onto the bed and hold him there. But then I notice that both of us are being lifted up. (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1995, p.71)

Earlier, Indridason's spirit controls had said that a spirit called Jon had accumulated a lot of power during the day. It was therefore thought that Jon was the force behind that evening's levitation, furniture movement and objects being smashed and thrown around (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1995, p.70). Not only does this case reveal these researchers' belief that a spirit caused Indridason's levitation, but that it had accumulated its power during that day, although the researchers did not ask the spirit guides how the power had been acquired. The chaos around Indridason that evening also suggests that the psi events that occur during poltergeist activity, spirit possession and at séances could have the same cause.

The true nature of spirits was questioned during research conducted by the Toronto Society for Psychical Research under the auspices of Dr Owen and his wife (Iris Owen, 1976). The group created a biography of a fictional character called Philip Aylesford (Chambers, 1998, p.59). Although not mediums, eight members of the Society then attempted to communicate with (the fictitious) Philip's spirit at regular séances. After a couple of years they succeeded and, as Chambers explains, "Philip then proceeded to retell the life story that had been created for him by the group" (p.60). Philip even provided some verifiable historical details of which the group had been unaware (p.60). When they first asked Philip to levitate the séance table, it only tilted and moved around the room, but eventually it lifted off the ground (Broughton, 1991, p.152). Although Spiritualists, shamans and poltergeist and spirit possession researchers are aware that some spirits can be petty, deceitful (Fisher, 2001) or harmful, the Philip experiments raise questions about the connection between spirits and the human mind. Chambers (1998, p.61) suggests that Philip could be seen as a "mental poltergeist" produced by the group's "collective consciousness" or perhaps as a rogue spirit "that used the group's created information to disguise itself". The Philip experiments have confirmed that some spirits may be unconscious projections, while others may be genuine, but not necessarily honest, entities. Nevertheless, this section has shown that spirit possession plays a major part in Spiritualism, although it is normally voluntary.

### 3.4 Alien Abductions

There are several aspects of spirit possession in the UFO literature. Alien abduction narratives have only appeared within the last fifty years, although there are some who assert that UFO sightings and close encounters have existed throughout history. Edward McBride (2003, p.3) claims that an Egyptian report from 3,200 years ago describing a rampaging demon in the sky is probably a UFO sighting, but back then such concepts were not available. Today there are people who claim that all aliens are evil or demonic entities. Dr Barry Downing, a pastor in the American Presbyterian Church and author of *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (1968), summarises some of the demonic theories about UFOs (Downing, 1980/2001, p.155). The secular-psychic theory is similar to the Jungian explanation for spirit possession. It suggests that modern society has suppressed part of its spiritual consciousness which is fighting back by projecting psychological archetypes into the skies. According to this theory UFOs "are a sign that the collective psyche of man is breaking down and, therefore, civilization is breaking down" (p.156). The secular-supernatural theory suggests that aliens from an adjacent dimension are using their supernatural abilities to manipulate us in any way they wish, sometimes to our disadvantage, and the Christian fundamentalist religious-supernatural theory suggests that UFOs and aliens reveal that "the Devil and his demons have been set loose on Earth in preparation for the end and the second coming of Christ" (p.156). These speculative theories appear to demonstrate a powerful fear of the unknown.

Martin Kottmeyer (2001a) asserts that "UFO belief is permeated by paranoid themes" (p.302). Many of these ideas are space age versions of traditional religious beliefs about the ubiquitous and subversive nature of demonic powers.

For example, John Keel writes that UFOs

seem to be nothing more than transmogrifications tailoring themselves to our abilities to understand. The thousands of contacts with the entities indicate that they are liars and put-on artists. The UFO manifestation seems to be ... merely minor variations of the age-old demonological phenomenon. (Keel, 1973, p.299)

One feature of the UFO phenomenon that directly resembles spirit possession is the concept of 'walk-ins'. As Dr Scott Mandelker explains, the term walk-in

describes a process of inter-dimensional, inter-planetary soul exchange, as well as the individuals who experience it. In this process, a soul from an older ET or angelic civilization (or a more evolved Earth soul) enters the voluntarily surrendered body and personality-system of a

human being, to better serve humanity and Earth. (Mandelker, 2001, p.636)

Few ufologists take the concept of walk-ins seriously because there is little evidence to support it. The people who make these claims do not display other traditional symptoms of possession, they do not ask to be exorcised and cannot prove that their souls have been replaced by alien ones. As a result of his research, Mandelker (1995) claims that there exist two kinds of people who claim to have non-human souls; 'wanderers' who acquire these souls at birth, and walk-ins who acquire them later, and, in his opinion, neither group displays any overt pathology.

Whoever aliens are, they appear to have the psi ability to remove abductees from locked houses and rooms, and during these encounters abductees may find themselves paralysed and unable to resist. Many abductees initially have problems recalling their experiences, although the memories may return later, especially if they resort to hypnosis. Similarly, after their exorcisms, most demoniacs have no memory of their possession experiences. Some repeat abductees assert that they value their close encounter experiences and that a form of mutual respect or cooperation eventually develops which enables them to question the aliens' activities and on occasions to refuse to participate in them. Some researchers assert that this positive perspective demonstrates the aliens' capacity to control abductees' minds, while others suggest that those who claim to value their encounters are attempting to avoid being psychologically crushed by their terrifying involuntary experiences. Some ufologists argue as to whether aliens are abducting people for positive or negative purposes. For example, in *Secret Life* (1992) and *The Threat* (1998), American historian and abduction researcher Professor David Jacobs adopts the attitude that aliens "are not here to help us. They have their own agenda, and we are not allowed to know its full parameters" (1992, p.305). Jacobs (2000, p.206) believes that researchers who do not regard abductions as having sinister motives (eg: Mack, 2000b) are being unrealistic.

There is a similarity between some aspects of the UFO literature and Spiritualism, which as mentioned earlier, can be seen as a form of voluntary spirit possession. The Austrian parapsychologist René Coudris (1997), who claims to have had a UFO close encounter, uses his wife as a trance channeller to communicate with the spirits of aliens who were supposedly killed in the Roswell UFO crash in America. As Klimo (1991, p.179) points out, mediumship is defined by some as communication



with spirits of the dead, whereas channelled information may come from any source. Channelling aliens and other discarnate entities is a popular New Age phenomenon, but, as Klimo explains, possession is still a possibility. "When an entity attempts possession, it is definitely a case of unwanted spontaneous channelling" (p.182).

Many alien abductions occur at night, often causing experiencers, unless amnesia occurs, to be confused as to whether they have had a nightmare, visionary experience, lucid dream, OBE, sleep paralysis, or something else. These encounters may involve sexual scenarios with aliens (Ritchie, 1994, p.185), or what seems to be genetic engineering technology. Some women claim to become pregnant after these encounters, although the foetus may later disappear (Rodwell, 2002, p.159). Regardless of their veracity, these experiences can be seen as modern versions of those involving demonic entities called incubi and succubi. In the Christian tradition, an incubus is an evil spirit in the form of a man that appears at night and has intercourse with a woman, whereas a succubus appears as a woman and seduces a man (Ritchie, 1994, p.109). It has been suggested that incubi and succubi are poltergeist-like projections from the minds of people suffering religious sexual repression, while others believe that these entities actually exist. As with the Philip experiments, this debate illustrates how little is known about the link between spiritual entities and human consciousness. If the mind is capable of creating spiritual entities, then some incubi, succubi and aliens may be produced in this manner, but that does not necessarily mean that they do not 'exist' in the conventional meaning of this word. Patrick Harpur (1994) asserts that some entities can materialize from the otherworld whenever they wish.

Ann Druffel (1998) provides nine resistance techniques to either prevent or cease abduction experiences. The "Appeal to Spiritual Personages" method (p.148) resembles Christian exorcism rituals to banish possessing demonic entities.

According to Druffel, for this method to succeed the abductee only needs

strong faith in a spiritual realm. Christ, Mohammed, the Lord God, guardian angels, the Archangel Michael, and other spiritual personages in which the experiencer has faith have been appealed to successfully. Religious artefacts also seem effective, provided the witness has faith that they hold some form of protective power. (Druffel, 1998, p.149)

Verifying the effectiveness of this technique is difficult because there may be no witnesses to the experience, or the person may be mistaken in thinking that they

are about to be abducted. On the other hand, if aliens genuinely exist, they may stop if the potential abductee becomes too stressed, leading to the mistaken belief that the spiritual personage appeal actually works. This section has shown that there are several aspects of the UFO and abduction phenomena that are similar to the possession syndrome and the religious beliefs surrounding it. Both fields involve a belief in spiritual or inter-dimensional entities with psi powers that have the capacity to interfere with a person's consciousness against their will.

### **3.5 Martial Arts: Qigong**

I have not found any examples of spirit possession within qigong. However, some of the involuntary psi symptoms that demoniacs occasionally manifest resemble the extraordinary abilities that advanced martial arts practitioners seek to achieve voluntarily. The first involves excessive gravitation. The Catholic exorcist Amorth (1999, p.72) mentions a case that involves excessive gravitation or mass control, seemingly the opposite of levitation. A large, fourteen-year-old boy, who was supposedly possessed, had a tendency to sit with crossed legs and "no amount of force could lift him off the ground; it was as though he had turned to lead". On one occasion, three sturdy young policemen were baffled at their inability to move him (p.72). During Anna Eckland's exorcism, sometimes "her abdominal region and extremities became as hard as iron and stone" making her so heavy that "the iron rods of the bed bent to the floor" (Nicola, 1974, p.129). Oldridge (2000) quotes the English example of Alice Samuel who was hanged in April 1593 for "sending devils into the bodies of five young girls" (p.111). In her confession to the Bishop of Lincoln she acknowledged the reality of demonic possession and claimed that because the demons within her own body were so heavy, her horse had collapsed on her way to the questioning (p.111). Even if Samuel's confession was extracted under duress it illustrates that there existed a cultural belief that linked spirit possession and excessive gravitation. Qigong practitioners learn grounding postures, one of which involves visualizing energy flowing down their legs which are rooted into the ground like a tree, thus making them heavier or harder to knock over. Practitioners who have mastered these techniques may voluntarily be using the same excessive gravitation psi force that occurs involuntarily during spirit possession, while at other times they may be using an opposing force to make themselves lighter, so they can leap faster, further, or higher. The question is how demoniacs involuntarily trigger these forces when martial arts practitioners have to

undergo a lot of training before they can achieve voluntary control of what may be the same power.

A second similarity involves another rare symptom of spirit possession, which is that a lump is seen or felt to move around under the skin of the demoniac. Oldridge (2000, p.111) quotes three historical examples in which invading spirits were experienced as something physical moving around within the body of the possessed persons, frequently within the stomach or belly. Cristiani (1974) reports that in the possession case of the Bantu girl Germana Cèle, in addition to other horrifying physical symptoms, sometimes a "lump would form under her skin and travel over every part of her body" (p.106). Before their exorcisms, the Illfurth boys' stomachs would sometimes swell up enormously. "They would explain this by saying they had something like a ball in their stomachs and that a live animal was running up and down inside them" (Cristiani, 1974, p.95). Danaos (2000, p.104) describes the first three stages of neikung training. In stage one, pupils must learn to gather both yin and yang chi within their bodies. The yin chi is put elsewhere, but the yang chi is put into the dantien energy centre near the navel. In level two, the yang chi is compressed so that the dantien will hold twice as much. In level three, the pupil learns to make the dantien ball of energy mobile so that it can be moved anywhere within the body. Danaos describes a friend who reached this stage.

This man had a 'ball' in his belly at the dantien point, a solid mass that he moved around at will. Manipulating the ball, ... this man could pass ch'i energy into his arms and legs. One physician, upon examining him, had thought my friend had cancer when he felt the huge lump; the doctor had gone through the roof when my friend had caused the ball to dance around. (Danaos, 2000, p.106)

At level four one learns to mix the large amounts of yin and yang chi that have been accumulated. As Master Chang explains, this may take several months or years, and during this time the yin and yang "float around inside the body, and the pain is incredible, constant, unbelievable. Only if you have the discipline to ignore it can you control them and put their power inside your dantien" (in Danaos, 2000, p.108). Combining yin and yang chi at this advanced level can be so dangerous that a pupil may die if something goes wrong (p.109). Qigong practitioners who have progressed to level four and beyond develop various psi abilities, but only if they refrain from sexual activity. There may be a connection between this martial arts training and a supposedly possessed, celibate nun or monk who feels something hard running around beneath the skin, and who also levitates —

something Master Chang is able to do. Similar energies may be involved, although one scenario results from sustained training and the other is involuntary. Another similarity is that qigong masters accumulate some of their chi through meditation, an activity to which some nuns, monks and ascetics also devote many hours. This does not explain, however, why children or secular people who do not meditate or are not celibate may develop these symptoms. When interviewed, qigong master William agreed that the objects or entities that some possessed people feel running about within their bodies are probably the equivalent of chi energy. In his opinion, these people may be suffering some sort of malfunction of chi or psi energy within their bodies, which they can only describe in culturally familiar terms such as animals or demons.

### **3.6 Mysticism**

Spirit possession in various forms exists in almost every religion and is not always seen as undesirable. For example, one could claim that a mystic, who is temporarily overcome by an ecstatic rapture, is possessed by divine or spiritual power, but he or she would probably welcome such an event. There are also cases where mystics suffer what appear to be intermittent possession symptoms, but they either learn to live with them or regard them as trials that they must endure. This section provides examples of mystics who supposedly endured unpleasant experiences which resemble possession symptoms and which again raise the question as to whether they are generated within the mind, by independent spiritual entities, or both.

Jacques Lacarrière (1963) recounts some of the fourth century experiences of early Christian "communities of ascetics and monks in the desert wastes of Egypt, Palestine and Syria" (p.7). As he explains,

A complete break with the world is not undertaken with impunity, one does not fast for years, hidden in the gloom of a cave or exposed to the scorching sun, without one's personality becoming completely upset. This trial ... finally brings about in the ascetic certain psychical phenomena to which the writings bear surprising witness. Those weird shapes which appear to the hermits during their meditations by night or in the full glare of the noonday sun, those fiends, the fantastic creatures that come to tempt the ascetic ... form the inevitable pageantry of those who have thought they were free of the world for all times, but have been unable to rid their minds of aggressive or alluring imagery. (Lacarrière, 1963, p.9)

When interviewed, the priest David suggests that when the desert fathers talked about battling demons, they were actually personifying what was in their hearts,

"like lust, greed and pride; all that stuff". In a possible example of this, the desert mystic St Anthony the Great supposedly endured "repeated attacks made by demons, and so violent were they that he felt his body was being beaten black and blue and he then lay unconscious on the ground for several hours" (Lacarrière, 1963, p.61). Lacarrière warns of hagiographical exaggeration in these reports, but believers seemed to consider such physical assaults as a sign of a mystic's advanced spiritual stature rather than the opposite. St Pachon claimed that, despite having spent many years in his cell "thinking of nothing but my salvation, I still continue to be tempted. ... Not a single day or night has passed without my being tormented or persecuted by the devil" (in Lacarrière, 1963, p.184). The desert mystics regarded anything unusual or miraculous that happened to them as the work of either God or the Devil (p.172), whereas modern psychologists would probably regard them as unconscious mental projections caused largely by sensory deprivation. Lacarrière (1963, p.201) says that levitation is only mentioned three times in the texts he consulted. St Ammon supposedly levitated across the Nile because he was ashamed of removing his clothes to cross the water. The monk Zosimus reported that he once looked down when he saw Mary the Egyptian starting to pray, "But when he looked up again, he saw that Mary was raised a full cubit [about 50 cm] above the ground and that she continued to pray while suspended in the air" (p.201). And Shenute supposedly levitated before a judge after being charged for his activities against heathen temples (p.201).

Cristiani (1974, p.38) compares St Anthony with St Jean-Marie Vianney, known as the Curé d'Ars, who was born near Lyons in 1786. Vianney was appointed curé (parish priest) of the small village of Ars in 1818 and worked there until his death in 1859, and for that entire period he stoically endured intermittent symptoms of the poltergeist-possession syndrome. Cristiani's (1974, p.20) explanation is that "If there are enemies of the soul, which we call demons, they could not fail to be aware very soon of the young priest's ambitions; and it would be inevitable that they would wish to nullify his work". This theory fails to explain why most other priests do not suffer similar symptoms. There were numerous unpleasant psi events that surrounded Vianney. Disturbing disembodied voices were heard at night, there was hammering on doors, the entire house would shake, and inside "there was a thundering sound as if several carriages were driving through it" (Cristiani, 1974, p.23). His bed caught fire, and once the noise was so loud that others rushed in believing he was being murdered, only to find him peacefully asleep, with his bed

inexplicably in the middle of the room. Vianney attributed these activities to the *Grappin* (his nick-name for the devil) and, to calm those around him, would remark that "The *Grappin* and I have got used to each other" (p.27). Vianney had remarkable clairvoyant and healing powers and could exorcise others with ease. His biographer, Abbé Monnin, claims that annually about twenty thousand people from all over Europe visited to be cured by him (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.74). Once, during an evening service, Father Gardette saw Vianney gradually levitate "until his feet were above the ledge of the pulpit" (Treece, 1993, p.262). To dispel whatever entities seemed to be bothering him, Vianney's own exorcism was arranged on several occasions but for various reasons never took place. Vianney's gifts and afflictions were enhanced or perhaps caused by his ascetic lifestyle; he hardly ate or slept and he regularly scourged himself (Cristiani, 1974, p.20). The English Spiritualist William Howitt claimed that "the truth probably is that M. Vianney had so reduced his body by fasting, penance and enormous exertion that he had opened himself to all kinds of spiritual impressions, in which the devil was sure to have his share" (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.74). Rather than being persecuted by the Church for his demonic infestations, Vianney was venerated and eventually canonised because of the saintly manner with which he persisted with his parish work when most others would probably have fled in fear or lapsed into madness. Vianney may have had deep psychological conflicts which, as one of the two poltergeist activity theories suggests, became exteriorised because of his strong innate psi abilities. One can even speculate that his approved psi activities such as healing helped reduce or divert the energy behind his poltergeist-possession symptoms.

Colin Wilson reports that exorcists are not always immune from possession. In the seventeenth century Loudun possession case, made famous by Aldous Huxley in *The Devils of Loudun* (1952/1970), "four of the priests who came to exorcise the 'devils' were themselves possessed, and two of them died of it" (Wilson, 1981, p.47). Huxley and others believe that the possessed Ursuline nuns were probably faking their symptoms, but, as Wilson points out, if that was the case, how do we explain what happened to the exorcists? One of them, Father Surin, "a remarkable mystic, became more-or-less insane for twenty-five years" (p.47), and Father Tranquille, who was a famous Capuchin preacher, "found himself in the horrifying position of writhing around on the ground, listening to his mouth uttering blasphemies, while his mind remained a detached spectator. This continued until he died in a state of exhaustion" (p.47). Another of the exorcists, Father Lactance,

apparently suffered the same fate. Rather than being possessed by exorcised spirits, Wilson (1981, p.49) suggests that these priests, who apparently behaved with appalling cruelty during the exorcisms, may have become the victims of previously repressed parts of their own minds. If some cases of possession are the product of archetypes rising to the surface, then it is possible that a form of psychological contagion can affect those who are emotionally susceptible, when they are surrounded by others displaying these symptoms. As Wilson points out, "We are all of us 'divided selves'" (1981, p.49), which presumably means that most people have emotional conflicts which, in the appropriate cultural conditions, can lead to dysfunctional behaviour that resembles spirit possession. On the other hand, if possessing spirits do exist, it is possible that, as perhaps with the Curé d'Ars, they find it easier to invade the minds of those with innate psi abilities and/or deep emotional conflicts.

It is hard to believe that the product of a mystic's mind can take on a physical form, let alone beat him or her unconscious, but the evidence suggests that this is possible. Alexandra David-Neel (1965) explains that "Tibetan mystics also affirm that adepts well trained in concentration are capable of visualizing the forms imagined by them and can thus create any kind of phantom: men, deities, animals, inanimate objects, landscapes, and so forth" (p.298). David-Neel was interested in discovering whether it was possible to create a *tulpa*, a phantom person, using such a technique. "I chose for my experiment a most insignificant character: a monk, short and fat, of an innocent and jolly type" (p.314). She went into seclusion and carried out the prescribed concentration exercises and rites. After a couple of months the phantom monk started to appear life-like. David-Neel then started on a tour of Tibet. Although she rode for many miles each day, the monk continued to accompany her, acting like a real person: "For instance, he walked, stopped, looked around him" (p.315). On one occasion a herdsman bringing a present into her tent assumed that the tulpa was a live lama. But then the "fat, chubby-cheeked fellow grew leaner, his face assumed a vaguely mocking, sly, malignant look. He became more troublesome and bold. In brief, he escaped my control" (p.315). David-Neel then "decided to dissolve the phantom. I succeeded, but only after six months of hard struggle. My mind-creature was tenacious of life" (p.315). One could claim that for six months David-Neel (1965) was partially possessed by a spiritual entity of her own making and that she was in a sense exorcising herself. She explains that Tibetan tradition warns that creating a tulpa can be dangerous for those who have

not reached a high degree of spiritual development. "Once the *tulpa* is endowed with enough vitality to be capable of playing the part of a real being, it tends to free itself from its maker's control" (p.313). She claims that there are stories of magicians being injured or killed by their creations. It is unclear what David-Neel means by the term 'vitality'. Is this some life-force or energy, like chi, that advanced meditators can accumulate in sufficient quantities to give life to a creation of their imagination? If David-Neel's claim that the mind can create independent physical entities is true, it throws into confusion the debate as to whether poltergeist activity and spirit possession are caused by spirits or mental projections, because it suggests that both arguments may at times be true. Another question that David-Neel does not answer is what happens to a tulpa if it escapes its creator's control. Does it disappear into the spirit realm to join others of a similar nature, or does it take on an independent physical existence like ordinary humans?

The last example in this section comes from Irina Tweedie (1979) who achieved her spiritual illumination at the feet of a Sufi master in India. One day an old man and his son, who was apparently possessed, arrived at the master's house. So that a crowd would not gather, the son sat on a step outside while the master stood in a doorway, obscured by a blind, staring at him silently.

The young man ... had a rather simple and primitive look about him. Suddenly he uttered a loud cry and then began to howl like an animal, with his mouth wide open, his eyes glassy and spent, like the eyes of a dead man. The expression of his face was terrible to see; it was like a contorted mask. (Tweedie, 1979, p.92)

Tweedie next observed that the man "was now lying on the ground having convulsions, froth streaming from his mouth, his face contorted and terrible" (p.92). The master pointed his finger at the writhing body and repeated "Go away" twice, whereupon a terrible voice replied that it would comply. There was then silence and the tormented body lay still. A while later the son sat up smiling and looking human again. When asked what had caused the possession, the master explained that "These kinds of spirits are rather powerful elementals. If they want an experience on the physical level, then they attach themselves to a human being" (p.93). He then added that "*If he comes back, I will burn him.* ... Sometimes they are rogues and then they come back" (Tweedie, 1979, p.93). The young man could not have been cooperating in an exorcism ritual because he was not participating in one. The Sufi master is asserting that some cases of possession are caused by spiritual entities. Like David-Neel banishing her tulpa, the master appeared to expel the



possessing elemental using the power of his mind, which suggests an interface at some level between human consciousness and the realm of spirits. Unlike most demoniacs, David-Neel and the Sufi master were spiritually developed, and their experiences confirm a link between mysticism and spirit possession.

**Interviews.** During my interviews with Christian priests and pastors, they were asked for their opinions about spirit possession, poltergeist activity and exorcism. Many of them pointed out that exorcism was a rare event and that mental illness had always to be eliminated first. Their opinions about so-called demonic entities are predominantly negative and fearful. For example, Philip believes that poltergeist activity is the work of Satan. "People very rarely come out at the end of such a thing with any clear understanding of what has happened or why it happened. And to me confusion is one of the important tools of the evil one, Satan". Speculating that confusing psi events are the work of demonic entities creates an unwarranted sense of dread about the unknown. The entire history of medicine and science is about exploring the unknown, so this attitude is more likely to perpetuate confusion rather than reduce it.

Both Francis and Gordon claim that the psi activities of shamans, Spiritualists, gurus and possessed people are probably demonic, which can be seen as an attempt to demonise spiritual activities other than their own. If a Christian saint can use psi healing powers then it seems inappropriate to discriminate against a guru, shaman or Spiritualist who does the same thing. Once, while on an overseas mission, Francis was speaking before a large crowd when "a woman began to manifest a demon". A local deliverance team removed her from the audience but next day Francis discovered that, although they had been throwing holy water and waving crucifixes at her, she was still screaming and hissing and several men were having trouble holding her. Reluctant to become involved, Francis quietly read aloud a deliverance prayer and "The moment I reached the amen, it left. ... And she just collapsed to the ground; her colour came back" and she appeared to be healed. Francis admits he was surprised at the result, and believes that it happened because the prayer "was anointed by God" and he was using it in faith. "That's what gives you the power and the right to operate. ... I just submitted myself to the divine majesty". Another explanation is that the possessed woman was healed because she unconsciously attributed a higher degree of spiritual power to Francis, an important overseas visitor, than to her local deliverance team. Francis' psi

powers — he claims to have once levitated and to have healing abilities — may also have helped. 'Submitting to divine majesty' could be seen as a way of attuning one's consciousness to some form of universal or transcendent psi healing power.

Michael, who claims to "have exorcised some people who had demonic spirits within them," echoes Leroy's (1928) views when he claims that saints may levitate "when they are communing with God in a very special particular way" but that shamans and séances "can be quite demonic". Michael believes that the power of the Holy Spirit comes through some exorcists with more strength than with others. As with Francis, this suggests that exorcists with psi abilities will be more successful than those without them, regardless of what is causing the possession symptoms.

Some priests acknowledge that negativity and fearfulness are not always appropriate. When asked what he thought of research into the spirit realm, Thomas replied that "I have no problems with trying to find out about the spirit world" and that "to me fear is something that holds us back and is debilitating. But I think also ... we have to be realistic about some things and I think sometimes there can be a danger in these things". If the mind is able to create spiritual entities like tulpas, then surely the incessant fear of demonic beings displayed by so many Christian priests and pastors could help create or sustain their existence. Constantly worrying and preaching about something may inadvertently provide it with what David-Neel terms vitality. Even if one believes that possessing entities are mental projections, being obsessed about them may assist in their appearance.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has shown that, apart from qigong, the groups contain some aspects of spirit possession. This is perhaps to be expected because most of the groups believe in the existence of spiritual powers or entities with psi abilities, including spirits of the dead, from whom they attempt to obtain information, healing, spiritual guidance, or power. This may involve brief, voluntary spirit possession, but on occasions involuntarily possession occurs. Although the Christian Church forbids its followers to communicate with spirits of the dead, some dramatic examples of involuntary levitation occur to demoniacs, although the evidence does not suggest that these people — who seem to come from all walks of life and age groups — were attempting to interact with spirits. The reason they become possessed remains unclear. Among the groups that attempt to communicate with spirits, the examples

of levitation seem to be largely voluntary or the result of only brief periods of possession. This may be because Spiritualists and shamans try to understand the dynamics of the spirit world and how to avoid negative entities. Another reason that advanced practitioners in shamanism, mysticism, Spiritualism and qigong avoid unwanted spirit possession may be because of their rigorous spiritual or meditative training, whereas the average Christian practitioner or priest shuns psi abilities and is normally only trained in theological matters. It seems that those who are unable to prevent themselves from becoming possessed are also unable to control their levitations. For example, the average demoniac or poltergeist sufferer seems to know very little about spirits or psi powers. Alien abductees may be slightly more knowledgeable because some of them have had psi abilities since childhood. Mystics, Spiritualists, shamans and advanced qigong practitioners seem to be the most informed about developing psi abilities. In brief, it appears that the more practical training you have in your group's conceptual map of the spirit realm and its link to human consciousness, the more unlikely you are to become involuntarily possessed and the more likely you are to be able to levitate at will.

This chapter has also shown that many consciousness researchers are reluctant to discuss psi phenomena. Assuming that spirits do not exist because the mind seems capable of splitting is not the product of sound empirical research. If the mind interfaces with a transpersonal realm and is capable of producing tulpas, then independent spiritual entities may well exist, which in turn suggests that human consciousness is more complex than some psychologists think. If the conscious and unconscious mind form a continuum with a transpersonal realm, it is understandable that there is confusion about what causes levitation. Those who have undergone sufficient meditation training would regard their consciousness as a gateway to universal consciousness. In a sense they no longer have an *unconscious* mind because they now have considerable experience in deliberately entering that part of their minds using ASCs. They are therefore unlikely to become possessed, they may be able to levitate voluntarily, and may regard the argument as to whether spirits or one's own mind causes possession as a meaningless distinction because in a sense they are using the power of their own spirit or soul to levitate. Those who are ignorant about their own unconscious will understandably want to personify or demonise whatever unknown force possesses and perhaps levitates them. All this suggests that voluntary and involuntary levitation is most likely to occur during ASCs, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4. Altered States of Consciousness and Breath Control**

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the theme of breath control and altered states of consciousness (ASCs) runs through all of the seven groups. Levitation examples are provided where one or both of these phenomena are present, which suggests that they may be linked to its cause. Possession states involve ASCs, so one could query why separate chapters are needed to discuss these matters. While an overlap is acknowledged, this chapter demonstrates that some members of these groups believe that they can gain access to psi abilities by changing their level of consciousness, either temporarily or permanently, without any apparent symptoms of spirit possession, and a common way of doing this is by breath control. It is noted, however, that mystics largely indulge in ASCs to achieve enlightenment rather than psi abilities because, as discussed in a later chapter, there exist religious taboos against displaying any psi abilities that they might develop. A second reason why possession states and ASCs are being discussed separately is that the former is an ancient perspective that is often surrounded by many religious assumptions, while the latter is a modern concept that has been the subject of some medical, psychological and parapsychological research. Although still in its infancy, this research has not yet yielded any undisputed theories to explain a connection between ASCs, breathing techniques and psi abilities. Indeed, there are many neuroscientists who do not believe that psi phenomena even exist.

The parapsychologist Charles Tart (1969; 1975) first coined the term altered states of consciousness. Because modern science is unable to define normal consciousness precisely, it is difficult to define ASCs. The term can refer to a wide range of consciousness states or medical conditions; for this research, the most relevant states are religious rapture, prayer, contemplation, meditative, visionary and trance states, shamanic ecstasy, sleep and dreams, hypnotic states, possession states and even death. There is little purpose in attempting to define these terms because the researchers and writers that I have quoted may use them differently. In addition, these states are often personal interior experiences whose content is not visible to others. Guiley (1991, p.8) defines ASCs as "Any of a variety of states characterized by a radical shift in the pattern of consciousness from one's 'normal' waking state". She also notes that "ASCs have been shown to be of some benefit in psi functioning, but have been difficult to study scientifically because of

their subjective and internal nature" (p.8). One of the few empirical means of assessing levels of consciousness is to measure brain-wave activity, although this technique cannot reveal subjective content. Researchers have divided brain frequencies into four levels: beta, alpha, theta and delta (Guiley, 1991, p.8). Beta (14-27 Hz) occurs during normal waking consciousness. Alpha (8-13 Hz) normally occurs during light hypnosis, meditation, daydreaming and just before and after sleep. Theta (4-8 Hz) occurs during light sleep, although some people can access this level during meditation. Delta (0-4 Hz) occurs during deep sleep. These categories do not define ASCs but they offer a perspective on what is happening during some of them. For example, advanced meditators from almost any spiritual tradition appear able to remain conscious while displaying theta brain patterns, whereas most non-meditators would be asleep at that level. Parapsychologists have also noted that, provided the subject remains conscious, slower brain patterns such as alpha are more conducive to psi activity such as ESP (Guiley, 1991, p.225).

Kelly and Locke (1981, p.22) conclude that a large amount of anecdotal evidence supports "the central broad hypothesis of association between altered states and paranormal capacities". Similarly, Miller's (1995) study of people who unexpectedly survive disasters suggests that, by unintentionally entering an appropriate ASC, they evoke psi powers that alter the course of events in their favour. The healer Matthew Manning claims that in 1974 a group of scientists measured his brain patterns while in different states of consciousness, such as while "attempting to bend a key paranormally" (Manning & Rose, 1999, p.68). According to their report, Manning's spectrum was "characterized by a large concentration of energy in the Theta waveband," which is normally characteristic of sleep rather than the waking state (p.68). The psychiatrist Joel Whitton, who tested Manning to discover which part of his brain was producing this electrical energy, concluded that it was "the limbic system, which lies beneath the cerebral cortex and may be described as the old animal brain we relied on before the development of our intellectual brain" (Manning & Rose, 1999, p.69). Similar results from other people with PK abilities would strengthen this conclusion, and it is interesting to note that almost all mystical traditions claim that one needs to still the mind to access spiritual or transcendent power. This suggests that by temporarily closing down the modern cortex, another level of the mind can be encouraged to swing into action.

The anthropologist Kalweit (1992, p.78) claims that research has shown that "if a drum rhythm is synchronized with brain-wave frequencies, it is easier to achieve an altered state of consciousness," which, in his opinion, reveals the importance of "drumming, rhythm, and chant in tribal cultures". Because it appears that people listening to a shaman's rhythm "do not fall into a trance unless it is expected of them," Vitebsky (1995, p.81) adds that "while music and dance can have powerful effects, they do not so much induce trance as organise it in relation to a belief system". Kalweit (1992, p.78) notes that it takes courage "to let oneself go completely" and enter whatever state lies beyond, which illustrates the "struggle between letting go of the self and keeping a tight rein of waking consciousness to establish security through reason". A willingness to embrace unknown states of consciousness may explain why, in what seem to be similar circumstances, some people levitate while others do not.

Most of the groups that produce levitation reports believe that all around us there is an invisible extended reality which holds the key to spiritual and psi abilities. They believe that the average person does not normally have conscious access to this spiritual realm, but it can be accessed by ASCs. Today, the spectrum of debate about this subject ranges from the claim that these states of consciousness are produced by the biochemical stimulation of certain parts of the brain — called neurotheology by some researchers — to the assertion that this extended reality genuinely exists and contains independent spirits and divine beings. Books on neurotheology (Alper, 1998; McKinney, 1994; Winkelman, 2000) suggest that because religious experiences can be induced by stimulating parts of the brain, science can now assert that these experiences are neurologically-based rather than evidence of some form of external divinity. This claim might be true in some cases, but not necessarily in all cases. A part of the brain which can interact with spiritual energy from beyond the body might produce an illusionary effect when artificially stimulated, but that does not prove that all spiritual experiences are illusory. More research is needed before the argument can be resolved either way. Another way of phrasing this issue is to ask whether human consciousness is entirely confined within the brain or whether we have a spirit or soul which can transcend the biological boundaries of the body. Those who believe in a closed model of the mind, which asserts that consciousness cannot extend beyond the physical body, tend also to deny the existence of psi phenomena. The open model, supported by most of the groups that produce levitation reports and by a minority of consciousness

researchers (see Lorimer, 2001; Walsh & Vaughan, 1980), claims that certain ASCs enable a person to access a transpersonal level of reality. Bucke (1901/1969) refers to this state as cosmic consciousness, while others use terms such as unity consciousness (Drury, 1991), mind-at-large (Ring, 1992), self-realisation, enlightenment, or illumination.

An obvious question to ask is what precisely it is that is altering during ASCs, and how this provides access to a transpersonal reality and psi abilities. A common New Age belief is that advanced spiritual states are accessed by moving one's consciousness to a higher vibrational frequency (Gerber, 2001, p.169). This term mirrors the science of the electromagnetic spectrum, but fails to specify what is vibrating and how it can be measured. It is also somewhat confusing given that during meditation a person's brain patterns appear to go slower rather than faster. Others appeal to the scientific concept of signal to noise ratio (Gruber, 1999, p.143): reducing sensory input and stilling the mind (noise) supposedly provides an opportunity for normally inaccessible information (signal) or levels of consciousness to be experienced. Professor Robert Jahn, from Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR), refers to the subjective feeling of love or resonance to explain some of the mind-machine PK phenomena produced in his laboratory.

The most common subjective report of our most successful human/machine experimental operators is some sense of 'resonance' with the devices – some sacrifice of personal identity in the interaction – a 'merging', or bonding with the apparatus. As one operator put it: "I simply fall in love with the machine". (Jahn, 1995, p.402)

Poets and romantics often describe being in love as an ASC, and mystics frequently advocate love as a way of opening oneself up to divine power. Eliminating one's personal identity or ego – often called union with the divine – is regarded as the ultimate step in almost all mystical traditions. Allowing one's entire being to resonate in an unrestricted manner with a universal force means that one has merged with, or even become, that force, which may explain why some of those who follow these guidelines develop psi powers, but this theory does not explain what precisely is resonating.

Wilber (1977) refers to a 'spectrum of consciousness' and echoes the Buddhist spiritual belief that a person's innermost level of consciousness "is identical to the absolute and ultimate reality of the universe" (Wilber, 1980, p.75). Radin (1997,

p.255) calls this belief transcendental monism; it "says that the mind is primary, and in some sense causes matter. The ultimate stuff of the universe is consciousness". But, as he points out, this theory merely "explains the mystery of mind and matter by referring back to the mystery of mind" (p.256). However, Radin, acknowledges that

from the scientific and theoretical perspective, when two fundamental elements of the universe — mind and matter — are staring us in the face and no one can explain how they coexist, this gives us a strong signal that some of our usual assumptions about the nature of reality are probably very wrong. (Radin, 1997, p.256)

Another perspective on the notion of an extended reality is to claim that it is so vast and overpowering that the normal human mind needs a filtering mechanism to reduce its impact. Aldous Huxley explains that

Each one of us is potentially Mind at Large, but in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. ... Mind at Large has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. ... Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of bypass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary bypass may be acquired either spontaneously or as a result of deliberate 'spiritual exercises'. (Huxley, 1963, p.23)

Kalweit (1992, p.85) claims that "the trance state is actually the real perception of mankind," and Wilson (1995) writes that "mystical experiences are simply a recognition that there is something badly wrong with 'normal consciousness'" which leads him to suggest that "the ultimate destiny of human beings is to evolve towards something altogether more godlike" (p.xix). Gruber, too, says that the driving force of all spiritual disciplines is

the yearning for a fundamental lost state of consciousness in which the gods and man communicated. ... Out of this desire ... ways and methods were developed to alter consciousness in such a way that phenomena that have no place in everyday conscious wakefulness would manifest themselves. (Gruber, 1999, p.143)

Wilbur (1997, p.24) believes that transcending the consciousness-filtering system by the transformative experience of spiritual enlightenment is a rare and shattering event, which, if they are linked, suggests that powerful, voluntary psi abilities are available to very few people. On the other hand, Miller's (1995) research suggests that ordinary people, who are not advanced in any spiritual discipline, sometimes benefit from involuntary psi powers while only in temporary ASCs.



A recent theory about the possible link between consciousness, physical reality and psi abilities is the 'holographic paradigm', a term which derives from the fact that holograms store information in a 'non-local' fashion. Unlike a normal film or photograph, if one cuts up a hologram, each piece contains a slightly degraded copy of the entire original image, not just a part of it. Talbot (1991) quotes from researchers such as physicist David Bohm (1980) to support the suggestion that consciousness can access the quantum realm where information may be stored non-locally. This hypothesis suggests that, when in an appropriate ASC, like a computer connecting to the Internet, the mind can enter a non-local domain containing extrasensory information and PK power. Physics experiments have revealed that under certain conditions some sub-atomic particles manifest non-locality (Talbot, 1991, p.52). Although not fully accepted by mainstream science, the holographic paradigm may begin to explain the transcendent nature of some psi abilities. Bohm (1980) proposes that physical reality has two 'orders'; a deep, enfolded, non-local level called the implicate order, and the normal, unfolded level called the explicate order. He believes that "everything in the universe is part of a continuum. Despite the apparent separateness of things at the explicate level, everything is a seamless extension of everything else, and ultimately even the implicate and explicate orders blend into each other" (in Talbot, 1991, p.48). Similarly, Grof (2001) asserts that "Each of us ... appears to be a microcosm containing in a holographic way the information about the macrocosm. In the mystical traditions, this was expressed by phrases like: 'as above so below' or 'as without, so within'" (p.160). Although the holographic paradigm does not explain human levitation, it suggests that ASCs can assist access to a non-local realm that may facilitate psi abilities.

A belief in a transcendent realm has existed throughout history and, although its descriptions reflect the cultural perspectives and lack of empirical research of those times, it may indeed exist. As LeShan (1974) demonstrates, modern, non-technical descriptions of what he terms Clairvoyant Reality provided by mediums, mystics and physicists are almost indistinguishable from each other. Today, some researchers and writers (Laszlo, 1996, 2003, 2004; McTaggart, 2001) are looking more closely at the evidence for such a realm – which some now call the zero point field – including its capacity to facilitate anti-gravity or levitation (Cook, 2002).

Ring's (1992, p.277) research reveals that 60% of people who have NDEs report an increase in psychic abilities. NDEs can be regarded as ASCs because people involved often claim to have been in an unusual state of conscious while they occur. Death itself is not normally regarded as an ASC except among those that believe in reincarnation or life-after-death. Blofeld (1974, p.190) explains that Tibetan Buddhism believes that "when the consciousness begins its wanderings in the bardo or intermediary state between death and rebirth, the words whispered by the Lama into the ear of the corpse can still reach him".

An anthology of anecdotal psi experiences (Spees, 2001, p.272) contains what may be an example of involuntary mass control occurring shortly after death. In February 1996, a female patient who was very religious and weighed about 150 pounds [68 kg] died at a nursing home.

Several minutes after she was pronounced dead, one of the nurse's aides went into the room to prepare her body. ... Expecting that it would take two people to help with the preparations, the aide asked for assistance. When the two aides started to move the patient's body, they found that she was as light as a feather. The aides were shocked — it was as though the dead woman's spirit had gone straight to heaven. (in Spees, 2001, p.272)

No further details are provided, but it would have been informative to have weighed the body to see exactly how much lighter the woman had become, whether the weight-loss persisted, and if any medical theory could explain it. The suggestion that the woman's spirit had gone straight to heaven is simplistic and implies that almost everyone else's spirit does not. In an attempt to find a similar case I contacted the management of a chain of funeral parlours in Perth, Western Australia, and asked if any of their staff had had such an experience. I was informed that all the bodies are taken to a central location for processing and that the manager could not recall a similar incident. However, if the weight-loss lasts, for example, less than an hour after death, funeral parlour staff would probably not arrive soon enough to notice it. In an example that occurs just before death rather than afterwards, Blofeld quotes an English friend who

during a visit to Sikkim, met a dying Lama who, while seated on the ground during the rites preparatory to death, temporarily lost control and, to his huge embarrassment, could not prevent himself from levitating although the occasion was so inopportune! (Blofeld, 1974, p.222)

While noting that Buddhism frowns upon the display of psi powers, Blofeld does not explain why losing control caused the lama to levitate. Was it because his spirit was

rising out of his body? Remaining on the ground does not normally require self-control, unless one is possessed by an unseen spiritual entity. Nevertheless, these examples imply that dying or death itself can sometimes be classified as ASCs.

Ostrander and Schroeder (1973, p.292) quote a report that "Mikhail Drogzenovich, a fifty-three-year-old farmer from the Bulgarian village of Stara Zagora, could supposedly levitate". They continue:

Before 'scientific witnesses' ... the husky farmer closed his eyes and sat down in a field. After intense concentration, he apparently slowly began to rise in the air until he was about four feet [1.2 m] above the ground. His eyes remained closed, thereby ruling out mass hypnosis of the observers. He sat in the air some ten minutes, while witnesses checked that there were no rope, equipment, or mechanical devices connected to the hovering Drogzenovich. Then the farmer slowly settled back to earth. "Once I'm in the air," he was quoted as saying, "I'm unable to change my position. I get there by will power."  
(Ostrander & Schroeder, 1973, p.292)

In this example intense concentration seems to count as an ASC. Will-power is a confusing term because, for example, a qigong master's will-power can throw an opponent backwards with no physical contact (Dong & Raffill, 1996), whereas an untrained person would probably produce no effect at all. No mention is made of Drogzenovich being in a trance, but he did not seem able to levitate while in a normal state of consciousness with his eyes open. Drogzenovich does not appear to fall neatly into any of the seven groups, but his claim only to be able to rise up and down matches that of Master Chang (in Danaos, 2000, p.158). Perhaps Drogzenovich has an unusually high sensitivity to the equivalent of chi energy. There may be several people in the world who unknowingly have this ability. Sitting down and concentrating intensely to see if one can levitate is not something that most people would ever attempt.

**Breath Control.** An ancient Hindu technique for achieving ASCs and psi abilities is *pranayama* which refers to breath control. The origins of pranayama are uncertain, but, as Blofeld (1974, p.221) explains, similar techniques are used in Buddhism and Taoism in order to purify "the vessel of Liberation".

Principally they are concerned with breath control, the control of some of the body's fluids and the cleansing of the psychic channels which link the chakras or psychic nerve centres to all parts of the body. The force which passes along the psychic channels is sometimes called Vayu (wind) but, like the Ch'i or K'i of Chinese Taoist adepts, it is of a kind much more subtle than the air we breathe. (Blofeld, 1974, p.221)

Pranayama is the fourth stage of Hatha yoga and is included in several other forms of yoga. In his translation of the yoga-sutras of Patanjali, Taimni (1975, p.258) provides a commentary on the five sutras that deal with pranayama. The simple justification for breathing exercises is that providing the body with more oxygen and prana increases the practitioner's vitality, but this explanation conceals a more complex and esoteric one.

*Prana* which exists on all the planes of manifestation is the connecting link between matter and energy on the one hand and consciousness and mind on the other. Consciousness expressing itself through the mind cannot come into touch with matter and function through it without the intermediate presence of *Prana*. Matter in association with energy cannot affect consciousness except through the agency of *Prana*. That is why *Prana* is found on all the planes. It is necessary for the vitalization and functioning of all vehicles of consciousness, physical or superphysical. (Taimni, 1975, p.258)

Paul Brunton (1937/1970, p.156) claims that "the stilling of the breath tends to still the thoughts," but also notes that

The vital force immanent in breath and the mental force which activates the brain, arises from a common source. That source is the One Life-Current which permeates the universe and, in each human being, becomes his Divine Self, his Overself. (Brunton, 1937/1970, p.156)

The ubiquitous nature of prana or chi may explain why it can supposedly be used for healing, levitation and other psi powers. Taimni (1975, p.259) claims that prana is "a real, highly specialized kind of composite energy with a material basis which is entirely different from the other kinds of energies working in the body". So, although prana is not the same as breath, one can manipulate its currents by learning to control one's breathing. The exact means of doing this are complex, dangerous and require years of training under the supervision of an advanced teacher. Several texts claim that pranayama may eventually produce certain psi abilities including levitation (Richards, 1980, p.81; Taimni, 1975, p.346). Some of the techniques involve breathing alternately through each nostril; learning to breathe more slowly; the retention of the breath for increasing periods of time; and reducing the 'breath length', which refers to the distance from the nostrils that one's breath can be detected. For example, Johari (1989, p.51) reveals that, by reducing the breath length from twelve to six finger widths, one acquires the "power to fly in the air and sky," and, at four finger widths, one gain the *laghima* (lightness) siddhi, which seems to refer to levitation.

A modern breathing technique to achieve ASCs – or non-ordinary states of consciousness (NOSC), as he calls them – used by psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (1993, p.20), is called Holotropic Breathwork which includes deep and rapid breathing. Exactly why this technique produces ASCs is unclear, but it may result from varying the ratio of oxygen to carbon dioxide within the body. Grof notes that

All the cultures with the exception of the Western industrial civilization have held NOSC in great esteem and spent much time and effort to develop various ways of inducing them. They used them to connect with their deities, other dimensions of reality, and with the forces of nature, for healing, for cultivation of extrasensory perception, and for artistic inspiration. (Grof, 2001, p.154)

The following levitation example involves a change in breathing. Noel works as a psychic for a leading Australian woman's magazine, and claims to have levitated twice when he was 16 or 17. On both occasions – the first time outside in a national park and the second time indoors on a lounge – he was with a small group of friends at night discussing spiritual matters. Noel decided to try to levitate.

I lay down, concentrated on slowing down my breathing which in turn seemed to slow down my heartbeat because my friends couldn't find a pulse, hear me breathe or hear a heartbeat, but I was fully conscious and talking to them. I then thought 'light' feelings, like I imagined myself floating, being weightless. I could feel when I lifted off the ground and off the lounge. It was slow and gradual but I knew exactly when. My friends said I lifted a couple of inches (6 or 7 cm) both times. On returning to the ground there was a massive burst of energy which jarred my entire body. (Personal communication, 15 July 2003)

Noel claims that his psi abilities began after an NDE "when I drowned at age seven," and that spirits were not involved in his levitations. His explanation is "that the power of the human mind and the control we have over our bodies and the energy that surrounds us all is far greater than many people realise." He believes that he was able to levitate because he had "a natural spiritual attunement to the energy, and certain spiritual experiences including visitations, visions, and astral travel". Noel describes the burst of energy and jarring that he experienced when he returned to the ground as his arms, legs and torso arching for a second as if he was "being shocked". Noel's brief levitation may have been facilitated by the equivalent of chi energy, and the burst of energy he experienced afterwards was perhaps yin chi rushing from the ground into his body to replace the energy that he had consumed. Danaos (2000; 2002) frequently claims that a burst of chi energy can feel like an electric shock.

#### 4.1 Shamanism

Eliade (1951/1989), Harner (1990), Kalweit (1992) and Vitebsky (1995) agree that ASCs are essential to shamanism. "Some sort of trance is fundamental to both shamanism and possession, but a shaman's trance, unlike that of a possessed person, is mostly highly controlled" (Vitebsky, 1995, p.64). Eliade (1951/1989, p.5) explains that "the shaman specialises in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld". Shamanic initiations may occur during dreams or visions: "But usually sicknesses, dreams, and ecstasies in themselves constitute an initiation; that is, they transform the profane, pre-'choice' individual into a technician of the sacred" (p.33). Eliade (1951/1989, p.107) notes that "What differentiates a shaman from any other individual in the clan is not his possessing a power or a guardian spirit, but his ecstatic experience". ASCs enable shamans to fulfil their various roles: "Healer and psychopomp, the shaman is these because he commands the techniques of ecstasy. ... Through his own ecstatic experience he knows the roads of the extraterrestrial regions" (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.182). It seems that access to the "mystical geography" of the spirit realms provides shamans with their psi abilities.

Harner (1990, p.47) differentiates between ordinary states of consciousness (OSC) and shamanic states of consciousness (SSC), which are used when the shaman enters nonordinary reality, otherwise known as the spirit realm.

The shaman moves back and forth between the two realities deliberately and with serious intention. Whichever the reality, the shaman thinks and acts in the way appropriate to it, and has as his objective the mastery of both his nonordinary activities and his ordinary activities. Only he who successfully masters his actions in both realms is a master shaman. Both personal realities of the shaman, the nonordinary and the ordinary, have their correlative states of consciousness. Each reality may be coped with successfully only when one is in the state of consciousness appropriate to it. ... A master shaman is fully aware of the appropriate consciousness for each situation with which he is faced, and enters into that state of consciousness as needed. (Harner, 1990, p.47)

Harner (1990, p.49) points out that the depth of a shaman's SSC may be confusing for an observer. To achieve the same results, an initiate shaman may need to enter a deep trance, while an experienced shaman may be in so light a trance that an observer does not notice it. Shamans in different parts of the world use different techniques to achieve SSCs, such as drumming or chanting. "For an experienced shaman ... just a few minutes of the familiar rattling and/or drumming is usually

sufficient to achieve the light trance in which most shamanic work is done" (Harner, 1990, p.51). If chanting is used, "The songs tend to be repetitive and relatively monotonous, mainly increasing in tempo as the shaman approaches the SSC. They may have the latent function of affecting central nervous system activity in a manner analogous to yogic breathing exercises" (Harner, 1990, p.53).

Blofeld (1960) describes an incident involving a shamanic trance and something resembling levitation in a mountain village in Thailand. After Blofeld arrived, a villager fell dangerously ill and "most people thought it was because I had sucked his soul into my camera" (p.125). That evening, after hearing drumming and droning coming from the sick man's hut, Blofeld went to investigate. In the middle of the poorly lit room "was the Mêng-Gong or tribal magician, his face hidden by a black mask" (p.126). The shaman, whom Blofeld describes as being in "a state of trance" (p.126),

was seated with his back to me on a bench some three feet [90 cm] high, thumping a drum and intoning a ritual in a voice full of power, but frighteningly inhuman. Now and then, an extraordinary, indeed a really awful, thing would happen. With a frightful scream, he would shoot about four feet [1.2 m] into the air and land back upon the bench with such force that it quivered threateningly. Such a movement by a seated man *whose legs never once straightened for the jump* was so uncanny that I actually felt a cold sweat start from my pores. It was much more horrible than words can convey. (Blofeld, 1960, p.126)

The psi power produced by the shaman's ASC seems to have enabled him to heal and almost levitate. Inexplicably shooting into the air sometimes occurs to pranayama practitioners and is thought to be the result of kundalini energy.

In the next two reports a shaman puts another person into a trance before levitating him, although it is unclear whether the psi energy flows from the shaman or elsewhere. The reports are by the conjurer Harry Kellar "who prided himself on his ability to detect tricks of any kind" (Inglis, 1979, p.25). Kellar travelled the world observing magicians and wonder-workers in an effort to widen his repertoire, and was prepared to acknowledge the probable psi nature of an event if he was unable to detect any trickery. The first levitation took place in Natal. Around his camp fire one evening, after Kellar had demonstrated a few conjuring tricks, the locals produced their witch doctor "who at first seemed reluctant to give his consent to an exhibition of his powers before me" (Kellar, 1893, p.80). The Zulu witch doctor then

took a knob kerry or club and fastened it at the end of a thong of rawhide about two feet long. A young native, tall and athletic, whose

eyes appeared to be fixed upon those of the conjuror with an apprehensive steadfastness, took his own knob kerry and fastened it at the end of a similar thong of hide. The two then stood about six feet [1.83 m] apart in the full glare of the fire, and began, all the while in silence, to whirl their knob kerrys about their heads. I noticed that when the two clubs seemed, in their swift flight, almost to come in contact, a spark or flame passed or appeared to pass from one of them to the other. The third time this happened there was an explosion, the spark appeared to burst, the young man's knob kerry was shattered to pieces, and he fell to the ground apparently lifeless. The witch doctor turned to the high grass a few feet behind us and gathered a handful of stalks about three feet [90 cm] long. Standing in the shadow and away from the fire, he waved, with a swift motion exactly similar to that of the clubs a few minutes before, the bunch of grass around the head of the young Zulu, who lay as dead, in the firelight. In a moment or two the grass seemed to ignite in its flight, although the witch doctor was not standing within twenty feet [6 m] of the fire, and burned slowly, crackling audibly. Approaching more closely the form of the native in the trance the conjuror waved the flaming grass gently over his figure, about a foot [30 cm] from the flesh. To my intense amazement the recumbent body slowly rose from the ground and floated upward in the air to a height of about three feet [90 cm], remaining in suspension and moving up and down, according as the passes of the burning grass were slower or faster. As the grass burned out and dropped to the ground the body returned to its position on the ground, and after a few passes from the hands of the witch doctor, the young Zulu leaped to his feet, apparently none the worse for his wonderful experience. (Kellar, 1893, p.80)

Kellar's only comment is that "the exhibition I have just described, was, I think, the most remarkable that has come under my vision" (1893, p.81) which implies that he thought no trickery was involved. The sparks and fire suggest that the Zulu shaman was using the equivalent of yin and yang chi energy to levitate the young man. Some of yang's qualities are that it can set fire to things and opposes gravity, while yin is passive, comes from the ground and is related to the pull of gravity, which suggest that levitation requires more yang than yin energy. Master Chang is capable of using his chi "to set a crumpled-up newspaper ablaze" (Danaos, 2000, p.xii). The Zulu shaman may have been using the dried grass as a measure of the available amount of yang chi. When it burst into flames after being waved around in the air, he knew he had enough energy to levitate the young man whose movement upwards increased with the frequency of the burning grass being waved near him, and who sank to the ground when the grass ceased burning. Although speculative, this makes some sense of a seemingly incomprehensible situation. From the start of the incident the young Zulu appeared to be under the influence of the witch doctor, like a hypnotist and his subject. His levitation while in a trance supports the link between ASCs and psi phenomena.



An American businessman who regularly travels to China provides an example of chi energy causing fire. He claims that in Beijing he sought healing from a qigong master because he has a supposedly incurable genetic disease of the stomach. While he lay on a bed in front of several witnesses the master stood over him and beamed chi energy at him with his hands. To the businessman's astonishment his shirt burst into flames causing significant burns to his stomach and chest (Personal communication, June 2003). This report appears to support the claim that chi can heal and set fire to things.

Kellar's second levitation example involving an ASC occurred "during the winter of 1875-6" in the Great Plaza of Calcutta before the then Prince of Wales and about fifty thousand spectators. "The old fakir who was the master magician of the occasion did his work out in the open plaza" which led Kellar (1893, p.78) to conclude that no hidden equipment was being used.

After a salaam to the Prince, the old fakir took three swords with straight cross-barred hilts, and buried them hilt downwards about six inches [15 cm] in the ground. The points of these swords were very sharp, as I afterwards informed myself. A younger fakir ... then appeared and, at a gesture from his master, stretched himself out upon the ground at full length, with his feet together and his hands close to his sides, and, after a pass or two made by the hands of the old man, appeared to become rigid and lifeless. A third fakir now came forward and taking hold of the feet of his prostrate companion, whose head was lifted by the master, the two laid the stiffened body upon the points of the swords, which appeared to support it without penetrating the flesh. The point of one of the swords was immediately under the nape of the man's neck, that of the second rested midway between his shoulders, and that of the third was at the base of his spine; there being nothing under the legs. After the body had been placed on the sword-points the second fakir retired, and the old man, who was standing some distance from it, turned and *salaamed* to the audience. The body tipped neither to the right nor to the left, but seemed to be balanced with mathematical accuracy. Presently the master took a dagger with which he removed the soil round the hilt of the first sword, and, releasing it from the earth, after some exertion, quietly stuck it into his girdle, the body meanwhile retaining its position. The second and the third swords were likewise taken from under the body, which, there in broad daylight and under the eyes of all the spectators, preserved its horizontal position, without visible support, about two feet [60 cm] from the ground. A murmur of admiration pervaded the vast throng, and with a low *salaam* to the Prince, the master summoned his assistant, and lifting the suspended body from its airy perch they laid it gently upon the ground. With a few passes of the master's hand the inanimate youth was himself again. (Kellar, 1893, p.79)

The fakir used 'passes' to induce and end the levitator's trance, a term which derives from mesmerism, animal magnetism and hypnotism in the eighteenth century when some healers found that they could induce trances in their patients by passing their hands over them. Exactly how passes work is not clear, but in those days psi abilities were called the 'higher phenomena' of mesmerism or hypnotism because they occurred in a significant percentage of entranced subjects (Inglis, 1989, p.52).

#### 4.2 Spirit Possession

Whether spirits exist or not, spirit possession appears to involve ASCs because possessed people do not appear to be in their usual state of mind. Whether demoniacs have had their consciousness invaded by spiritual entities, or whether their symptoms are the result of archetypes rising from within their minds, or some other emotional affliction, their consciousness is clearly profoundly altered during the possession. Cramer (1979) claims that "perhaps the most essential symptom of demoniacal possession is *amnesia*" (p.23), meaning that those who are successfully exorcised generally have no memory of what happened to them, which again suggests they have been in an ASC. After his exorcism Theobald Burner was unable to recognise the people who had constantly been around him for the four years of his possession (Nicola, 1974, p.124). Cramer also links such ASCs to psi events.

Demoniacal possession involves a division of consciousness, and without such a division the production of paranormal phenomena becomes at best severely limited or, more probably, impossible, since these intense psychical events cannot be consciously willed but are at the mercy of the forces of the unconscious psyche. (Cramer, 1979, p.24)

Cramer does not explain why he believes that only the unconscious psyche can produce psi events, but it appears that after sufficient meditation — which can be seen as a method of consciously accessing the unconscious mind — some mystics can deliberately cause psi events, while others need to be in deeper ASCs to access these powers. Cristiani's (1974, p.70) list of possession symptoms do not include psi phenomena, but many of them suggest that the person would be in an ASC. It is unlikely that all these symptoms would occur at once, and several of them can be caused by medical conditions that have nothing to do with demonic forces. Some of the symptoms are:

- (1) Convulsions, displaying an intelligence foreign to that of the patient
- ... (2) extraordinary movements which could not be produced without

long practice, such as jumping, dancing, balancing feats ... (3) distortions, intolerable pain ... (4) sudden loss of senses and feelings ... (5) animal cries, strange howlings, of which the patient is unconscious ... (6) strange and demonic visions in an otherwise normal person; (7) sudden and violent rages ... (8) inability to swallow or retain blessed food or drinks. (Cristiani, 1974, p.70)

The remarkable feats of agility displayed by some seemingly possessed people seem to involve ASCs and mass control. Leroy (1928, p.17) quotes the 1857 example of two girls from Morzines who "were taken with strange fits which some people considered demoniacal". The girls could climb trees with astonishing speed "but were quite at a loss how to climb down if the fit subsided when they were at the top" (p.18). Hippolyte Blanc describes how the girls "climbed with unusual ... rapidity up to the topmost branch of trees forty or fifty metres high, leapt from there with a somersault on to another tree several metres off, [and] climbed down with their heads downwards" (in Leroy, 1928, p.18). On another occasion a supposedly possessed boy climbed a huge fir tree on the way back from his father's funeral and balanced on his head at the top while singing. His brother shouted at him to behave himself and come down. The boy seemed to come out of his trance, became frightened and called for help. The brother on the ground rather cunningly called out for the devil to possess him again so he could descend. "The fit caught him again; he stopped crying and climbed down with his head downwards as fast as a squirrel" (Leroy, 1928, p.18). Although the extraordinary strength and agility exhibited during ASCs appears to be involuntary in demoniacs, some advanced martial arts practitioners and athletes learn to achieve them voluntarily by meditating or focusing their minds appropriately, which can also be called ASCs. Why mass control and exceptional abilities occur during ASCs and to what extent they are paranormal is unclear, but the evidence confirms that spirit possession involves an involuntary alteration to normal consciousness.

### **4.3 Poltergeist Activity**

Current explanations are that poltergeist activity is either caused by mischievous spirits, by projected PK powers from the unconscious mind of the person who is the epicentre of the activity, or by a combination of both theories. After reviewing 500 examples, Gaud and Cornell (1979, p.359) conclude that some cases are the work of "a discarnate entity" while other are caused by "a living agent". Playfair's (1980) composite theory is that the living agent's unconscious PK energy is being hijacked by mischievous spirits, which assumes that the unconscious mind interfaces with a

spirit realm. Rather than resulting from deliberate ASCs, the living agent theory suggests that poltergeist activity happens when, for whatever reason, a person's emotional conflicts have not entered, or have been banished from, their normal level of consciousness. In other words, rather than attempting to expand the boundaries of their consciousness as mystics and shamans seem to do, these people are unconsciously doing the opposite or, to put it another way, their minds have split into two parts that do not communicate with each other. So, although poltergeist activity may not be the result of people deliberately entering ASCs, these theories postulate an unconscious realm from which emotional conflicts are projecting PK powers beyond the confines of the physical body, which means that part of the living agent's mind is in the equivalent of an ASC. Rogo (1990, p.255) even suggests that relieving unresolved tensions this way can at times be therapeutic. Roll (1976) notes that the human agents sometimes experience dissociated states, which is another term for ASCs. Gauld and Cornell (1979) report a case where the agent entered a trance and "talked with unusual freedom of her dissatisfactions. During these trances, there were no poltergeist phenomena — it was as though the two were alternative outlets for the same repressed emotions" (p.340), which appears to support the unconscious PK rather than the mischievous spirits theory. A person may also experience trances when poltergeist activity expands into the poltergeist-possession syndrome. For example, on several occasions, Janet, the young girl at the centre of the Enfield poltergeist case, entered a violent trance (Playfair, 1980, p.106), and once she started crying in her sleep and then became hysterical. Because the researchers were unable to wake her, they concluded that she was in some sort of trance (p.63).

Matthew Manning (1974, p.75) describes how, when he was fifteen, he could at times reduce the poltergeist activity around him by producing automatic writing. He first noticed this one day while writing an essay. His hand involuntarily started to write material that he knew nothing about, and simultaneously the poltergeist activity decreased. "Matthew realised that he could control the poltergeist manifestations by allowing himself to be used as a channel for automatic writing. Since then Matthew has taken down many hundreds of automatic messages" (p.75). Many of these messages appeared in different styles of handwriting and sometimes contained verifiable information of which Manning was not consciously aware. Whether this seemingly clairvoyant information comes from disincarnate entities or the unconscious mind, the fact that using automatic writing as an outlet

can decrease poltergeist activity reveals a link to the mind. Whether people producing automatic writing are in an ASC or whether just the parts of their minds that control their hands and language have become dissociated from normal consciousness, it seems clear that at least some cases of poltergeist activity are closely related to unusual aspects of consciousness. Although poltergeist activity is still an unresolved issue, it frequently seems to be connected to unconscious emotional conflicts and the living agents sometimes enter trances. Shamans and Spiritualists deliberately enter ASCs to interact with spirits or access psi powers whereas in poltergeist activity, and perhaps in spirit possession, it is as if this mechanism is activated unconsciously and/or involuntarily.

#### 4.4 Spiritualism

ASCs and regulated breathing feature strongly in Spiritualism because spirit or trance mediums frequently slow their breathing and go into trances or meditative states during séances. Eric Post (1946, p.116) reports that Spiritualists acknowledge that the deeper the medium's trance "the better the phenomena". He explains that there are three stages of trance. The first is "the subliminal trance, in which the medium is partly conscious of his or her surroundings but sees everything more or less distorted". The second stage is "the subliminal trance in which contact with material things is entirely lost and the medium seems to be conversing with spirits, often repeating in a low voice what they have said". The third stage is "deep trance, in which the body of the medium is totally unconscious and anesthetic" (p.116). Fodor (1933/1966, p.37) writes that it is a "common observation that trance begins with a change in the rhythm of breathing" and that in yoga, psychic development is also "attributed to proper breathing". He also notes that, apart from acknowledging these connections, neither psychical nor medical researchers seem able to provide a convincing explanation for them. Speaking of trance states, Johnson explains that

A 'medium' or a 'sensitive' can pass voluntarily into one of these states, in which consciousness is withdrawn to an interior level of the self, and can at the same time maintain a 'communication line' — by writing or speaking to those around. It is therefore possible for a sensitive to exteriorise knowledge possessed by levels of his own deeper self. (Johnson, 1955, p.126)

As an example of this, Playfair (1980, p.64) recounts how, in an attempt to communicate with the Enfield poltergeist, a Spiritualist couple, George and Annie Shaw, visited the house. Annie sat in the middle of the living room and "began to

breath heavily" before entering a twenty minute trance during which she took on the personalities and voices of some of the poltergeist entities while her husband sternly instructed them to depart. The medium Eusapia Paladino would also slow her breathing before entering a trance (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.390). Witnesses at one of her séances described her being levitated on her chair while entranced. Both her hands were being held by researchers when a voice speaking through her announced that she would be lifted onto the table. Without hitting anything, the chair with Paladino on it was deposited on the table and a while later returned to the floor (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.199). Gissurarson and Haraldsson (1995, p.61) provide several examples of the entranced medium Indridi Indridason and his chair being levitated. Once, during a darkened séance, the medium was deliberately put on a creaky basket chair which enabled the sitters to track its movement as it levitated over their heads and was "rather noisily deposited on the floor" behind them. "Then the light was immediately lit and there sat the medium unconscious (in a deep trance) in the chair" (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1995, p.62).

Sometimes at Indridason's séances a 'watchman' was used to maintain physical contact with the medium while the lights were off. On one occasion the watchman called out that Indridason was being pulled up into the air "with his feet turned towards the ceiling and his head downwards" and that the levitation force was so great that he could only just prevent himself from being lifted into the air with the entranced medium (p.77).

Harry Kellar, who was initially sceptical about Spiritualists' psi abilities, attended a séance with the trance medium William Eglinton in Calcutta in 1882. Kellar was holding Eglinton's left hand and, as soon as the lights were switched off,

I felt him rise slowly in the air and as I retained firm hold of his hand, I was pulled to my feet, and subsequently compelled to jump on a chair and then on the table in order to retain my hold of him. That his body did ascend into the air on that occasion ... there can be no doubt.  
(Kellar, 1893, p.78)

Florence Marryat also reports on the entranced Eglinton's levitations:

Indeed, I do not think I have ever sat with him at a séance during which he has *not* been levitated. I have seen him on several occasions rise, or be carried, into the air, so that his head touched the ceiling, and his feet were above the sitters' heads. (Marryat, (1891/1973, p.129)

Fodor (1933/1966, p.388) collected the subjective experiences of various mediums while entering trances. Home claimed to feel dreamy and dizzy for a few

minutes before losing consciousness, whereas Eglinton describes feeling ecstatic. Leonore Piper claimed that something would make her brain go numb as if she was being etherised and she would then remember nothing until she awoke. To test the depth of her trances, researchers conducted experiments that today would probably not be sanctioned. A spoonful of salt was placed in her mouth to confirm that her lips and tongue were insensible to pain; strong ammonia was applied to her nostrils; an incision was made in her left wrist which did not bleed until she regained consciousness; a needle was suddenly pushed into her hand and a feather was inserted into her nose (p.389). Similar tests were done to check Indridason's trances. Needles were stuck "in several delicate spots in his body – in his hands, on the back of his neck, in the corner of his eyes and elsewhere – but he showed no reaction at all" (Gissurarson & Haraldsson, 1995, p.55).

Researchers noted that changes in some medium's breathing were reminiscent of yoga breathing. "The trance as a rule, begins with hissing intakes of breath and ends with deep expirations" (Fodor (1933/1966, p.390). Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) "believed that his powers were connected with a system of respiration. He said that in communing with the spirits he hardly breathed for half an hour at a time" (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.390). The physician and psychical investigator, Baron Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929) studied the mediumistic skills of the brothers Willi and Rudi Schneider. When in a trance, Rudi's breathing, which he could maintain for over an hour, was likened to a steam engine or a tyre being pumped up (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.390), reaching between two and three hundred respirations per minute (Carrington, 1946/1973, p.55). Amazingly, doctors noted that Rudi's rapid breathing had no effect upon his body (p.55). The Baron reported that another of his subjects, Karl Weber (or Karl Kraus), levitated himself twenty-seven times using breathing exercises when not in a trance (in Fodor, 1933/1966, pp.201 & 337).

Interviewee Garry claims to have levitated over twenty years ago when he was 23, before he became a Spiritualist. Because he had back pain, Garry visited a healer.

I remember lying down on the table, face down, and after a bit of massage he put his left hand ... where the head meets the neck, and the right hand on the base of the spine. ... [The hands] weren't actually on my body; they were probably about two or three inches [5-7.5 cm] above. And, I felt something changing within the energy field, and it was probably within a minute or two that I noticed there was some

flowing going on internally in my physical body. And the only way I could describe it was like the blood flow I guess. Things started to rush.

The healer held his hands over Garry for at least five minutes. "And as this rush was going on, my heart started to race faster and I noticed my breathing was starting to amplify". Garry's breathing involuntarily became faster and deeper:

It all happened so fast, I can't tell you how long it took, but as the breathing got faster, so I felt the heart, and it got to a stage where it felt like ... when you finish a hundred metre sprint. And it was at that point that I started to rise off the table.

It seemed to Garry that the energy rushing through his body caused his breathing and heartbeat to increase in unison until he levitated into the air. Because he was lying face-down he was able to estimate that he was "at least nine inches to a foot" [23-30 cm] above the table. Garry briefly looked sideways and saw that the healer had his hands in the same position and his eyes closed. He estimates that he remained in the air, still breathing heavily and feeling the energy rush through his body for about a minute. Then "I started to go down again. Slowly, very very slowly. And then, when I reached the table again ... everything started to drop off again. The breathing and the heart". After the session, Garry commented that he had an amazing experience but the healer said very little: "Just general pleasantries". The pain in Garry's back was relieved but not cured, and he never visited the healer again. All Garry knows about him is that he was in some sense a spirit medium: "he could see spirits and talk to spirits". It has not been possible to locate this healer to ask whether he deliberately levitated Garry or whether it was a side-effect of the energy that seemed to come from his hands. It is unclear whether this energy increased Garry's heart and breathing rate which in turn led to the levitation. If an increase in heart and breathing rates alone could cause levitation, there would be many more levitation reports than exist at present. Garry, who has a Catholic background, is now a Spiritualist and healer himself, although he does not claim that his levitation led him to these roles. Garry reports that "My grandfather was very psychic. [He] saw a lot of spirit[s] and he talked with them" which suggests that psi abilities could be culturally and/or genetically dependent. Some people are supposedly more sensitive to psi or healing energy than others. Dong and Raffill (1996, p.41) quote Dr Lu Wuwen, who claims to be able to use his chi to make opponents fly several metres backwards by waving his hand at them. Dr Lu says that there are four levels of sensitivity to chi.

If the master sends chi from his hands at a person with high sensitivity, the target will be pushed back violently. Such a person can even be made to jump around when simply standing near a chi kung master



who is directing chi at someone else. A person of medium sensitivity will be pushed back by direct chi from the master, but not affected indirectly. One of low sensitivity will experience strong heart thumping, chest discomfort, or dizziness; and one of no sensitivity will not feel anything, although there may be internal injury. (Dong & Raffill, 1996, p.42)

It is possible that Garry levitated partially as a result of his sensitivity to the energy that the healer was beaming at him.

When interviewed, the spirit medium Oliver describes witnessing someone levitate while in a trance. In about 1995, a man in his thirties, who was interested in Spiritualism, was invited to attend a closed circle of seven people in Perth, where Oliver was the medium. As usual, they sat in a circle around a small table without touching each other. While watching the newcomer, Oliver opened with a prayer. "And all of a sudden his arms went out ... and he just started to rise up, about a foot [30 cm] off the chair, and he stayed there ... [he] didn't say anything." Oliver, who believes that spirits caused the levitation, says that the man was in a trance and "he didn't even know what he was doing". He remained in the air for about ten minutes while the others sat and watched in awe. Afterwards the man could not recall what had happened. Like demoniacs, this sort of amnesia often occurs to trance mediums after they come out of their ASCs. These examples clearly illustrate that for Spiritualists voluntary or involuntary ASCs and/or breathing are frequently essential for the production of psi phenomena.

#### **4.5 Alien Abductions**

ASCs feature in alien abductions and ufology in several ways, although there is no evidence that they are the result of breath training. As mentioned earlier, two of the basic theories to explain UFOs claim that they are either unconscious psychic projections (cosmic poltergeists), or that aliens originate from an otherworld that is accessible by ASCs. In Vallee's (1990b, p.216) UFO close encounter classification system, 'close encounters of the fourth kind' involve ASCs or "reality transformation" which covers "those anomalous reports with entities in the reality of the entities themselves. They include near-death experiences, religious miracles and visions, and many cases of out-of-body experiences". Similarly, Nick Pope (1997, p.261) claims that "There are certainly some compelling reasons to suppose that abductions do not take place entirely in our reality". In Vallee's opinion, "what takes place through close encounters with UFOs is control of human beliefs, [and]

control of the relationship between our consciousness and physical reality" (in Story, 2001, p.628).

English ufologist Jenny Randles was one of the first to report that ASCs were frequently involved in UFO close encounters and coined the term the 'Oz Factor' (after *The Wizard of Oz*) to describe them. Randles (1988) notes the frequent rapid onset of the effect "which creates the impression of temporarily having left our material world and entered another dream-like place where magic rules" (p.23). She explains that the result of the effect is "a dreamy and weirdly silent state of mind that is recognised as peculiar by the baffled abductee, even though they do not appreciate what it implies" (p.22). Other ufologists acknowledge the existence of abductee ASCs but are equally baffled as to how and why they are induced. Cassirer (1994, p.205) claims that it is an open question whether we will be able to solve the problem "seeing that the phenomenon seems to hail from impenetrable dimensions of enchantment". In his study of the similarities between abductions and NDEs, Ring (1992, p.43) observes that "The onset of the encounter itself is often marked by an unusual alteration in consciousness — almost as though one has been swept up into some sort of a time-space warp where the ordinary boundaries of reality have been temporarily breached". In a similar vein, Mack (2000a, p.61) claims that "Those of us who work with abductees may ourselves be drawn towards an awareness of unseen realms of the infinite, in which the laws of space/time reality as we know them seem not to apply". Mack admits that it is hard for traditional science to investigate 'the subtle realms' that he believes are involved in the alien abduction phenomenon, because this aspect of reality involves

phenomena that may manifest in the physical world but seem to originate in another dimension, to come from a place unseen. We are speaking of matters which are not readily observable under ordinary 'separatist', dualistic scientific or methodological conditions, but make their presence known more subtly through an opening of consciousness or more receptive perception. (in Stacy, 1996, p.9)

Randles (1988, p.222) suggests that, rather than "crossing the immense void of space in machines," advanced extraterrestrials "have harnessed the power of consciousness to cross the gulfs of space and seek out new life forms". In other words, she is suggesting that aliens have such an advanced understanding of consciousness and psi that they can enter and explore abductees' minds from within, which implies that human consciousness interfaces with a multi-dimensional realm that can be used for teleportation and a form of mind control or possession.

In so doing, aliens impose on abductees a confusing state of consciousness that, depending on their predisposition, may be interpreted in a positive or negative light. Some regard their encounters as visionary or spiritual experiences, while others interpret them as hallucinations or nightmares. These interpretations match ones from several of the other groups. Some regard psi phenomena as the work of independent spiritual entities, while others regard them as generated within the mind of the experiencer. For example, some claim (eg: Pope, 1997, p.253; Randles, Estes & Cone, 2000, p.299) that alien abductions are the result of sleep paralysis. Even if this is true in some cases, they are still examples of ASCs. Once again, it seems that we are unlikely to resolve this conflict until we learn more about the nature of human consciousness and/or Cassirer's dimensions of enchantment.

As with spirit possession and Spiritualism, another ASC feature of abductions is amnesia. Because many abductees initially cannot remember their close encounters, some ufologists regard the experience of 'missing time' as an abduction symptom. For example, a person driving along an isolated road at night who sees a light in the sky and then gets home later than expected, may have undergone an abduction experience which ended with the equivalent of a post-hypnotic suggestion to forget what has happened. In the early days of abduction research, hypnosis was used to find out whether episodes of missing time concealed abduction or contact experiences. This did not always work because, even when in a trance, some abductees displayed what seemed to be deliberately imposed memory blocks or were too frightened to proceed. Those who did recall an abduction experience were often able to provide detailed narratives of, for example, being floated up to a UFO where they underwent various medical-like procedures at the hands of alien beings. In his analysis of abduction narratives, the American folklorist Thomas Bullard (1987, 1989) notes that they lack the typical fluidity of folk narratives and therefore concludes that they probably originated "in some kind of experience" (Bullard, 1991, p.1). Some sceptics claim that false memory syndrome is the most likely explanation for these bizarre narratives because hypnotists generate abduction memories by asking leading questions. This helps explain why abduction therapists today use the term 'regression' rather than hypnosis to describe their memory techniques. As Mary Rodwell (2002, p.98) explains, regression is merely a relaxed state during which "memories or dreams can be accessed more readily". Jacobs (1998, p.219), however, believes that conscious memories are not as reliable as those recovered by a competent

hypnotist, because some cases have revealed that aliens leave abductees with benign conscious memories of their encounters whereas deeper hypnotic probing reveals less pleasant experiences. Whichever perspective one adopts, this illustrates that ASCs are an integral part of the abduction phenomenon.

My previous research (Harvey-Wilson, 2000) revealed numerous similarities between shamanic initiation experiences and alien close encounters. For example, some shamanic neophytes receive their initiation during dream experiences (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.13) as do some abductees (Mack, 1995, p.405). Like shamans, many abductees claim to have developed psi abilities such as clairvoyance and healing, although others report having these abilities before their abduction experiences. This leads Basterfield and Thalbourne (2002, p.17) to suggest that "Perhaps, despite the anecdotal evidence, alien abductions are ... not 'psi-conductive', but happen to people who are highly prone to psychic encounters anyway". Mack also found similarities between abductions and shamanism:

The altered consciousness that abduction encounters bring about resembles in some ways the trance states of shamans, and like indigenous peoples, abductees are brought closer to a natural world that is alive with spirits of all kinds and is increasingly perceived as sacred. (Mack, 2000a, p.154)

Many abductees regard the aliens they encounter as advanced spiritual beings who point out that humankind's emotional and spiritual limitations are perhaps irrevocably harming our planet. Like shamans, these abductees therefore advocate the environmental and humanitarian benefits of expanded spiritual awareness. Reflecting the suggestion that humans have a consciousness-reducing valve, some abductees point out that the aliens they encounter are much more conscious or aware than normal humans (Mack, 1995, p.208). This expanded consciousness may be why aliens seem to have such powerful psi abilities and could explain why abductees, who seem to be pulled into ASCs during their close encounters, develop similar powers. Mack's observations lead him to ask whether there is

a shared, collective consciousness that operates beyond our individual consciousness? If there is a collective consciousness, how is it influenced, and what determines its content? Is UFO abduction a product of this shared consciousness? If, as in some cultures, consciousness pervades all elements of the universe, then what function do events like UFO abductions and various mystical experiences play in our psyches and in the rest of the cosmos? (Mack, 1995, p.8)

Rebecca, who claims to have had a UFO close encounter, reports that in Alaska, when she was thirteen,

I had been singing ... for some two hours with four of my girlfriends around a campfire at a lake. I was quite high spiritually; it was like being one with God. There was Spirit and it was fluidic and I was a part of all. It was quite euphoric. Some would call it joy or bliss I believe. There came a point during this state in which this idea came into my head (while very much in trance) and I just stated that I was going to walk on water like Jesus did, and I headed for the water's edge which was some ten feet [3.05 m] away. I took three steps upon the top of the water and watched myself take those three steps; realized what I had done ... and sank. All four of my girlfriends at the time witnessed this; though in later years only one remembered. I dare say they were as high as I was spiritually; for it is my opinion that in that case as others, music, especially singing certain types of songs, raises one's vibratory levels ... into altered states of consciousness. The three steps I took upon the top of the water didn't take much time; and, although I did watch my feet as they stepped, I don't remember the steps being slowed or quickened any more than just normal steps. I would say it was fun; I certainly wasn't frightened. (Personal communication, 10 May 2003)

Rebecca claims that she has been psychic all her life.

I used to tell my mom bad things that were going to happen so she could stop them and she wouldn't listen to me, and then they happened, and then I would get blamed for making bad things happen. I could tell you what was behind cupboard doors, and words that other people were thinking would pop out at me in great big bold letters.

Rebecca reports that "in my late twenties, early thirties" while married and living in Alaska, "maybe 3-4 times a year" her husband would wake her at night to point out that she was floating "some 3-4 inches [about 9 cm] off the bed". Initially he was horrified about her levitating, but eventually got used to it. "I had no conscious awareness till he would wake me that I was doing anything of that particular nature". Once woken, Rebecca would fall slowly onto the bed. She reports that she had a UFO close encounter in 1996, and claims to be able to heal. When asked what she believes causes levitation, Rebecca says that

I don't think I would say that it is spirits that get us to levitate and that goes for any physically manifested phenomena. It occurs within us as the result of an altered state, even though some may be vulnerable to power from either side which could influence such things: ie: being helped along or assisted or, if from the dark side, quite possibly forced, if one were weak. (Personal communication, 10 May 2003)

Rebecca seems to have been born with psi abilities, which may account for her subsequent spiritual, shamanic and close encounter experiences, including levitation while asleep. Sleep can occasionally be regarded as an ASC. For example, some people claim to have clairvoyant or prophetic dreams (Fodor,

1933/1966, p.107). Shamans may interact with "gods, spirits, and ancestral souls" (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.103) during dreams, and abduction experiences that occur during sleep (Mack, 1995, p.89) confuse abductees as to whether they were dreaming or not.

Another example of sleeping levitation comes from Francis who is now a Catholic pastor, but says that when he was young he "dabbled a lot with the occult". He shared a house with a practising witch, did yoga, read New Age books and experienced astral travel. One night while lying on his bed "in the half asleep, half awake stage" and with a friend on an airbed in the same room, Francis heard voices and some beautiful music. His eyes were open, enabling him to see the full moon through the window, when some black shadows, that he had seen several times before, entered the room and said "There he is, let's get him". At that moment his friend woke up and saw that Francis was levitating "about half a metre or so off the bed". Francis was unaware that he was levitating and claims that, because of his occult indulgences, the shadows were demonic, although today some might claim they were aliens. Excited about the levitation, his friend took the reluctant Francis to a Spiritualist church because he obviously had "a gift of some sort". Francis has not levitated again, but, like Rebecca, he seems have innate psi abilities. He once prayed for someone who was dying from leukaemia and within two days the person was fully healed. If Francis does have healing abilities, it would match the claim — as discussed in the next chapter — that a significant number of levitators also have other psi abilities.

#### **4.6 Martial arts: Qigong**

Breathing and ASCs are an important feature of martial arts traditions such as qigong, although qigong breathing is also widely practised for health purposes (Pike, 1980). Harish Johari (1989, p.7) reveals the connection between breathing and longevity. He claims that the scriptures of Swara Yoga assert that "the life span of a man is measured not in years but in number of breaths," so one's life span is increased by reducing one's breathing rate. Pike does not link psi abilities and breathing exercises, but points out that, to achieve success in the martial arts, one must use meditation to still the restless mind (p.136). When practitioners demonstrate the capacity to break bricks and pieces of wood, their power is "achieved by total concentration of mind, body and breath, concentrated upon the

single spot and the single thought until nothing else exists in the universe except the strike" (Pike, 1980, p.136). Dong and Raffill make a similar point;

When we practice chi gong and enter a relaxed, meditative state, the rate of blood flow increases, the temperature rises, the breathing slows, the internal body feels as though a light electric current is flowing through it; it feels like stepping into a magnetic field, the body becomes light and seems to float. (Dong & Raffill, 1997, p.140)

Dong and Raffill (1997) claim that qigong is one of the major sources of psi abilities because, among other things, practitioners learn to enter meditative states and attune their bodies to "the fields of the universe" (p.135). Meditation also assists in the accumulation of chi (Danaos, 2000; 2002; Dong & Raffill, 1996, p.vii) which, as a PK force, is used to throw combat opponents without touching them. Danaos (2002) also explains that meditation is a state of awareness between waking and sleeping that corresponds to theta brain patterns and that powerful meditators like his master can even access delta patterns. "A true immortal, like my master, can enter into a state of suspended animation wherein he will not need to draw a breath for eight continuous days" (p.122).

Another reason why advanced martial arts practitioners train themselves to meditate more deeply and breathe less frequently is that it helps persuade their bodies to convert from using normal energy sources, including oxygen, to more universal or spiritual sources such as chi, which can provide vastly more power as well as psi abilities. As interviewee qigong instructor John explains, by breathing correctly using the diaphragm and the stomach muscles, practitioners gain access to more energy including chi, and the exercises are also "meant to open your acupuncture channels and meridians". With appropriate training this transpersonal power becomes more easily available all the time, not just during meditation. In other words, a true master may have permanent psi powers that a neophyte can only access during an ASC. Murphy (1992, p.449) quotes a famous Taoist precept: "Meditation in activity is a hundred, a thousand, a million times superior to meditation in repose. The stillness in stillness is not the real stillness; only when there is stillness in movement does the universal rhythm manifest". Qigong teacher Maurice claims that qigong can facilitate psi activities "because it's not our energy we use, we use the energy that comes from the universe through our bodies. So we are like a channel". Maurice believes that, by slowing their breathing, qigong practitioners are tuning into deeper levels of consciousness that are connected to chi and the paranormal or, as Bradley puts it, "you've got to be able to advance your

meditation, turn your senses inwards and look for the unseen things". Victor explains that in advanced meditation one must learn to remain still and empty in an effortless manner, "then you allow the external energy [chi] to come in". To avoid making the mistake of *trying* to be effortless, one simply concentrates on the breathing exercises in order to "let the energy carry you".

Murphy and White (1978) reveal that many athletes, adventurers and martial arts practitioners admit to having experienced altered or mystical states of consciousness — described by some as being in 'the zone' — that produce exceptional or psi performances. Morihei Uyeshiba had such abilities. A former student explains that, when invited to attack Uyeshiba, he found himself flying backwards through the air as if he'd been thrown by a giant spring (in Murphy & White, 1978, p.99). Qigong teacher William describes seeing a similar demonstration in 1974, while studying aikido. A master instructed about six martial arts teachers to attack him as he crossed a room. They attempted to move towards him but, to William's amazement, although the master "didn't physically touch any one of them ... they were all [thrown] on their backs". Instead of walking across the room, William noticed that the master just glided along above the ground. The master claimed that his fighting abilities were of no consequence, but what was important to him was that "We were all sparks springing from a fire. He wanted union with that fire," which reveals that the master was a mystic. William points out that when teaching qigong he emphasizes that one must learn to harmonise mind, body and breath. "The mind is usually the worst of all, ... it's a mad monkey for most people. So to cool it down, the practice of breathing is there". Similarly, qigong teacher Bernard claims that chi or prana can be moved "through the vehicle of the breath and ... through the vehicle of the mind". In his opinion, the ability to control and direct chi seems "to be a common theme that is used for people to get in touch with the paranormal powers".

Qigong teacher Peter claims to have seen his Taoist qigong master levitate at a Chinese monastery in 1989. At that time, Peter, who was studying to become an ordained Taoist monk, was in the training hall with several other monks. The master, who was about 45 and had spent most of his life in the monastery, was seated at one end of the hall in the lotus position. "He moved from that still position straight up off the ground, very very slowly until he was approximately 10 to 12 feet [3-3.5 m] off the ground". He spoke to the monks for about half an hour



while hovering in the air and then moved slowly down. Peter explains that although he was about 20 to 25 feet [6-7.6 m] away from the master, the hall's acoustics were good enough for the monks to hear him clearly, and they appeared to regard the levitation "as being completely natural and quite normal". When asked whether the master was in a trance while levitating, Peter explained that, because he was so spiritually advanced, the master was still able to speak while in a slight trance: "So I would say both his subconscious and his conscious mind was functioning fully at the time whilst this was actually happening".

The American psychiatrist and psi researcher Dr Berthold Schwarz (1998) provides an account of the levitations of Joe Nuzum who is "An expert in the martial arts and, in particular, Ninja abilities" (p.32), a tradition which originated in Japan. Schwarz's article contains over thirty photographs of Nuzum levitating while in a meditative pose in his home in Washington, Pennsylvania, early in 1991. Two rolls of film were taken by Nuzum's partner Sandra and, according to the technician that developed them, there is no sign of double exposures and the negatives seem normal. In the pictures, Nuzum appears to be levitating about sixty centimetres above an armchair, with his hands clasped in front of him and his eyes raised upwards as if he is in a trance. In order to levitate, Nuzum told Schwarz (1998, p.38) that he sat down "and thought about levitation while he slowly went into a trancelike state". Although not a witness to the levitations, Schwarz has had prolonged contact with Nuzum and asserts that he is an honest person whose psi abilities, which have been developing since adolescence, should be the subject of further research.

His paranormal demonstrations should also be carefully correlated with his detailed subjective accounts so that there can be better insights into how he puts himself into the necessary prerequisite trancelike states for levitation and his other psychic feats. (Schwarz, 1998, p.44)

Schwarz explains that although Nuzum "is dyslexic (functional illiteracy), he is a whiz on the computer and his psi influenced the computer in many incredible ways" (Personal communication, July 2001). Nuzum's dyslexia may be related to his ability to enter ASCs and manifest psi powers. Perhaps his consciousness-filtering mechanism is not as rigid as most people's. For example, both Joseph of Cupertino and the Curé d'Ars had extraordinary psi abilities but were reported to be so scholastically inept that they were lucky to be accepted into the Church. The nature of some people's consciousness may enable them to develop psi powers much more easily than scholastic talents. The parapsychologist Dr Alexander Imich describes seeing Nuzum levitate in May 1997. Using an eight foot [2.4 m] red nylon

cord, Nuzum "formed an irregular, four-sided figure on the floor and then stood outside of the figure at one of the corners" (Imich & Ritch, 1997, p.92). Imich explains what he then witnessed:

Standing approximately seven feet [2.15 m] away from him, he [Imich] has seen JN's [Joe Nuzum's] feet slowly leaving the floor, and rising to a height of six to seven inches [15-18 cm], then gliding in the air for a distance of three to four feet [0.9-1.2 m] and gently landing inside the roped figure. (Imich & Ritch, 1997, p.92)

After the performance, Sandra Nuzum revealed that three days earlier, on her husband's fortieth birthday, he had levitated "in a semiconscious state" high enough for his head to be near their bedroom ceiling (Imich & Ritch, 1997, p.92). These examples illustrate the correlation between ASCs and extraordinary abilities such as levitation in the martial arts.

#### **4.7 Mysticism**

The mystical practices of almost all religions involve deliberately induced ASCs such as contemplation, meditation and prayers, which are often achieved using breathing techniques. Involuntary ASCs such as rapture or ecstasy also feature in the lives of many mystics. In comparing the levitations of mystics and mediums, Leroy (1928) writes that "With a few rather doubtful and therefore negligible exceptions, levitation never occurs in the cases of mystics outside ecstasy, and in those of mediums it is attended by a similar physiological condition called *trance*" (p.212). He also claims that one would find "in both cases common symptoms such as insensibility, low temperature in the extremities [and] slackening of the breath" (p.212). As perhaps the most famous Christian levitator, Joseph of Cupertino exemplifies the link between ASCs and psi abilities. Pastrovicchi gives numerous examples of his tendency to lapse into trances or ecstasies.

At the age of eight he experienced his first ecstasies. When, at school, he would hear the organ or the songs the teacher practised with the more advanced scholars, he would let his book fall and remain immoveable with eyes raised to heaven and lips parted. Owing to this his companions called him 'bocca aperta', 'open mouth'. (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.2)

In adult life Joseph was an ascetic; he slept on bare boards, ate very little and "continually lacerated his body with a scourge studded with needles, pins, and star-shaped pieces of steel" (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.14). Until ordered to stop the practice, he wore chains and pieces of metal strapped tightly around his body under his robes. Joseph would frequently lapse into ASCs: "The least thing pertaining to God sufficed to cause him to cry out and to lose the use of his senses" and, like

some spirit mediums, the depth of Joseph's trances was sorely tested by his colleagues: "when pricked with needles, struck with iron, burnt with a torch, or touched on the apple of the eye with the tips of the fingers, he did not move in the least" (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.29). Despite his insensibility to pain, Joseph could be brought out of his rapture by the command of his superiors.

When enraptured, neither blows nor the application of fire could recall him to his senses, but if obedience called, he returned forthwith. On being asked one day to explain this, he replied that he did not hear the voice of his superior when enraptured, but because God loved obedience so well, and desired that he should obey without delay, He made the vision disappear at once. (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.65)

Almost all Joseph's levitations occurred while he was in a trance. Leroy (1928) reports that at Fossombrone Joseph hurled a lamb into the air and levitated after it to the height of the surrounding trees. "He remained thus in the air, kneeling, for more than two hours" (p.93). Shortly before Joseph's death, two doctors were cauterising his right leg when they realised that he was levitating above his chair. One of them, Francesco Pierpaoli reports,

I had already begun cauterising, when I noticed that Father Joseph was rapt out of his senses; his arms were outspread, his eyes open and lifted to heaven. His mouth was wide open, his breathing had nearly stopped. I noticed that he was raised about a palm over the said chair, in the same position as before the rapture. (in Leroy, 1928, p.101)

In Hinduism the term samadhi is used to describe the state of extreme concentration, trance, religious ecstasy, or divine intoxication, and, like Joseph, the Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) would frequently enter this state spontaneously. Once, while "completely intoxicated with divine love," Ramakrishna claimed that when a person has attained "Perfect Knowledge he sees only one Consciousness everywhere" (in Gupta, 1974, p.263), which implies that religious ecstasy enables mystics to bypass the mind's consciousness-filtering valve to enter a universal state of awareness.

The Spanish Carmelite nun and mystic, St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), was seen levitating while enraptured, which is classified as an ASC. Sister Anne of the Incarnation reported that once she observed Teresa, who was then her prioress, kneel to pray.

As I was looking on, she was raised about half a yard [46 cm] from the ground without her feet touching it. At this I was terrified and she, for her part, was trembling all over. So I moved to where she was and I put my hands under her feet, over which I remained weeping for something

like half an hour while the ecstasy lasted. Then suddenly she sank down and rested on her feet. (in Thurston, 1952, p.12)

Another levitating ecstatic was St Alphonsus Liguori (Leroy, 1928, p.112). On several occasions while preaching Liguori was seen to levitate by the entire congregation. Brother Verdesca describes how in 1762, on entering Liguori's cell

I saw him lifted two or three palms from his chair, in the position of a person half kneeling and half sitting. His arms were outstretched, his eyes open and lifted to heaven, his face was glowing and as it were transfigured. ... His ecstasy lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, which to me did not seem to be long. (in Leroy, 1928, p.114)

Sreenath Chatterjee (1887) describes a case of Buddhist levitation that combines breath control and trance that he witnessed at his home in India. He claims that one morning he found a Tibetan lama "at my door begging his food, after the custom of Buddhist religious mendicants, and liking his appearance, asked him to come in, and gave him food and lodging" (p.726). Just then, Chatterjee's milkman "a Bhootanese who spoke the Tibetan language, happened to call" (p.726).

Through him as interpreter, I asked the Lama if he possessed any *siddhis*, or psychic powers. He enquired what phenomenon I should like to witness. I replied that it would be very instructive if I could see him rise into the air. He asked for a private room, called me in alone, shut the door, and drew the curtains before the window. Then stripping off his clothing to the *languti*, or breech-clout, he took his seat upon an *āsana*, or small board, that I had placed for him. Crossing his legs upon the thighs, close to the body ... he brought ... his hands against the abdomen, sat erect, turned his eyes upward, and remained for a while motionless. His next action was to work his body with a wriggling motion, at the same time drawing several very deep breaths. After the third or fourth inhalation he seemed to retain the breath in his lungs, and for half an hour was as motionless as a statue of bronze. Then a succession of nervous shiverings ran through his body, lasting perhaps three minutes, after which he resumed his state of immobility for another half hour: his eyes all the while fixed as at first. His skin was free from perspiration and all signs of exhaustion; his chest did not rise and fall in the natural way of one breathing; his body did not seem stiffened but retained its normal suppleness. ... Suddenly he, still retaining his sitting position, rose perpendicularly into the air to the height of, I should say, two cubits — one yard [1 m], and then floated, without a tremor or motion of a single muscle, like a cork in still water. His expression of face was placid in the extreme. ... After I had regarded him in amazement for at least a couple of minutes, I thought to myself that that was quite enough to satisfy my curiosity, and I hoped he would not give himself any more trouble on my account. At once, as though my thought had been read, he gently descended to his place on the *āsana*. He then emptied his lungs by three or four strong expirations, opened his eyes, stood up as easily and naturally as though he had done nothing extraordinary, and laughed upon noticing my signs of bewilderment. (Chatterjee, 1887, p.726)

The lama informed Chatterjee that "this sort of 'common-place Siddhi' could be performed by even Lama-pupils in his Guru's monastery who were not very far advanced" (p.727). He claimed that there were some adepts "who rise to the height of 15 feet [4.5 m] from the ground in their self-levitations" (p.728), which seems to imply that more training is required to levitate to this height. The yoga techniques taught at the monastery included "*pranayam* (training of the breath), the various *asana* (bodily postures), levitation, etc" (Chatterjee, 1887, p.727).

The Sufi mystic Jalalu d'Din Rumi would sometimes levitate while in an ASC.

Whenever he became deeply absorbed in prayer and devotion, he would rise from his seat and spin round like the Mevlevi dervishes, the order that he founded. And sometimes he would leave the ground altogether, rising up into the air. (Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.128)

The German veterinarian, P. Müller, reports seeing something similar in Turkey, in July 1916 while attending a gathering of Rafai white-robed dervishes who were dancing in circles. After about an hour everything seemed to intensify and one of the dancers rushed into the middle of the circle. "And now the incomprehensible happened ... slowly the whole tense body of this man elevated itself about eighteen inches [45 cm] off the floor and remained there, floating in the air with the toes pointing down" (in Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.132). He remained in the air for about thirty seconds before slowly descending and then collapsing.

Interviewee Alison, who claims to have levitated twice, provides another example of the connection between breathing and levitation. In about 1968 Alison was a twenty-five-year-old student of Hatha yoga in the Australian state of Victoria. She had been doing yoga classes twice a week for about three or four years. She reports that one evening "after a meditation and yoga class" the students were "going through a relaxation" while lying down. "The teacher was going through all the various parts of your body ... the suggestion of relaxation as she went through them all". The relaxation exercise started upwards from the feet. Part of the exercise involved "relaxation breathing, just taking the breathing in through your nose, out through your mouth". This involved deep breathing to full lung capacity, holding the breath for about a second and then letting it out very slowly. "As she had gone through and we were ... lying down ... at the end of it, there were no voices, no nothing. And then I just felt ... [a] gentle floating sensation". Alison claims that "I just sort of went with the feeling, and let it go". Alison had her eyes closed and would not have been certain that she had levitated had her yoga

teacher, who was sitting up watching the students, not come up to her afterwards and said "Did you realise that you lifted from the mat?" Alison believes that she levitated while on her back for about five minutes and was no more than 20 centimetres above her yoga mat. Rather than opening her eyes or panicking, she "just went with it because it just felt so good" and continued doing the breathing exercise. The only other feeling that Alison experienced during the levitation was "like an energy field, a warmth" from below her body. Her return to the mat was "quite gentle". Two or three months later, the yoga teacher, who had been watching Alison closely, noticed that she levitated again under the same circumstances. Alison says that she wasn't trying to levitate on either occasion but that it was "a lovely feeling" when it happened. Although her parents did not appear to have any psi abilities, Alison, who like Garry was raised as a Catholic, recalls that her grandmother, who was "part-Irish, part-Indian," sometimes seemed able to predict events. For about five years when she was younger Alison attended Spiritualist meetings with a girlfriend. There are some similarities which may be relevant to Garry and Alison's levitations. They were both breathing deeply and lying horizontally when it happened. Both seem to have an interest in spiritual matters and, rather than panicking, they allowed the levitation to happen and felt good about it. These similarities alone are unlikely to make someone levitate, so there are probably other relevant ASC components in these and other cases.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated that ASCs feature in all seven groups. The levitation examples reveal that ASCs and breathing exercises are closely connected to the development and use of psi abilities. A trained person can deliberately enter ASCs more easily, and those with advanced meditation experience seem able to access psi abilities while only in a light trance. For some people, breathing exercises help induce ASCs, while in others they seem irrelevant, which suggests that breath control is a natural and convenient way of entering ASCs, but that other techniques can also be used. What is not clear is why ASCs facilitate psi abilities whereas normal consciousness does not. One possibility is that ASCs help transcend the filtering system that supposedly lies between normal awareness and the expanded level of consciousness or spiritual realm where psi powers are available. However ASCs operate, it seems that levitation is almost impossible in a normal state of consciousness. The reports reveal a variety of levitation scenarios: people in ASCs

may levitate spontaneously or deliberately, while others seem to be levitated by shamans, fakirs, or perhaps spirits, but do not recall what happened to them. In Alison's case, although she can recall her two levitations, she is unaware of what caused them, but she was in a relaxed ASC and had been doing breathing exercises.

In almost every levitation report the person leaves and returns to the ground slowly and safely. No explanation has been provided for this, but if some reports are fictitious, one might expect them sometimes to describe the levitator crashing to the ground. This suggests that these reports may be true and that whatever is causing the levitations is not just an unmediated, arbitrary power but represents, or is filtered through, some form of intelligence which monitors the welfare of the levitator. This mirrors the observations of poltergeist researchers who note that although flying household objects may be destructive and frightening, they seldom cause serious injury. Similarly, although Joseph of Cupertino was entranced while levitating, his aerial flights frequently followed a meaningful rather than random trajectory. Although not conclusive proof, these observations match the ancient mystical claim that consciousness, matter and energy are unified at a fundamental or transcendent level that is accessible by ASCs. Apart from the question of how psi abilities such as levitation may be possible, one of the most significant empirical issues raised by the apparent link between psi abilities and ASCs is whether consciousness is solely the product of the human brain or whether it can somehow transcend the physical body and access a universal consciousness or psi power. In other words, is the open or closed model of the mind correct? The beliefs of the seven groups, and the apparent link between breathing exercises, ASCs and levitation reports, suggest that the open model is more likely to be true.

## **Chapter 5      Levitators' Other Paranormal Abilities**

The theme this chapter documents is that within all the groups there exists a wide range of psi abilities apart from levitation. Some levitators have numerous other psi talents, some possess just a few, while others appear to have none. It is not clear why these abilities are distributed unevenly. A brief review illustrates the range of psi abilities among the groups. By definition, all shamans have psi abilities such as healing and the capacity to communicate with spirits; some of them seem able to levitate and many have numerous other abilities. All spirit mediums, but not all Spiritualists, have psi abilities such as clairvoyance which supposedly enables them to communicate with spirits of the dead. Some physical mediums have more powerful PK abilities than others and a few sometimes levitate. Many demoniacs manifest a range of psi abilities, which sometimes includes levitation, and which normally ceases when they are exorcised. Poltergeist activity refers to numerous disturbing psi events which occasionally involve a person being thrown through the air. As with possession, the poltergeist problem is considered resolved or banished when the psi events stop, although some people learn to channel the energy into more productive enterprises such as healing. Some alien abductees claim to have developed psi abilities such as healing, and a small percentage of them levitate. Most qigong students have no psi abilities at first, but a few advanced practitioners seem to develop a large range of psi abilities including healing. Priests, monks and nuns from most religions are discouraged from using the psi abilities they may develop as a result of contemplation or meditation, but some advanced mystics are reported to have numerous powerful psi or miraculous abilities such as healing.

As this list reveals, the groups have different attitudes towards psi abilities; some are seen as unpleasant and some are encouraged. Most shamans, spirit mediums and qigong practitioners view psi abilities in a positive manner, but demoniacs and those experiencing poltergeist activity would probably want all psi activity around them to cease, and many mystics seem ambivalent about psi events unless they can attribute them to a divine being. This raises the question of whether a psi event is the result of personal abilities, psi power flowing through a person from a spiritual source, or whether the event is the work of a discarnate entity. This chapter discusses levitators' other psi abilities, their nature and implications, and the next chapter discusses the various taboos that the groups have about psi abilities.



The claim that there exists a range of psi abilities in addition to human levitation can be interpreted in a number of ways. Sceptics might assert that because human levitation seriously challenges their beliefs, the assertion that some levitators have several other psi abilities is even more implausible. They might suggest that including these psi abilities in a study of levitation undermines the already precarious credibility that levitation reports have. This is perhaps a relevant point, but, given that this study has consistently criticized other researchers for ignoring psi reports that challenge their beliefs, it would be hypocritical to omit them from this research just because they are controversial.

As well as a thematic comparison, this research is a hypothesis-generating exercise that seeks clues about how human levitation might work. If some levitators have other psi abilities, then a brief review of these abilities might help explain the nature of psi power in general, which in turn might provide additional information about levitation. It is possible that whatever causes levitation has no relationship to other psi abilities, but the evidence appears to suggest otherwise. For example, some people do not seem to develop just one psi ability, they tend to have several. Researchers have traditionally categorized psi into two groups, ESP and PK — or, to use the terminology of Spiritualism, mental or physical psi abilities. The parapsychologist Dr Michael Thalbourne (2001) points out that, until more is known about them, psi abilities should perhaps come under one heading because, for example, ESP may actually be the result of one mind psychokinetically affecting another. However one categorizes them, the anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be an undifferentiated power or intelligence behind people's psi abilities which can be focussed or channelled in a variety of ways. Joan Halifax supports the suggestion that spiritual energy exists in an undifferentiated form until it is channelled through the shaman.

The initial call to power takes the shaman to the realm of chaos, the *limen*, where the cosmos is disorderly, where power moves freely — untransformed. ... Only the practice of power allows for its mastery; and only through time and experience is the potentially damaging power safely manifested. (Halifax, 1982, p.9)

There may be evolutionary or social reasons why certain psi abilities are more prevalent than others. For example, in indigenous societies a person who can levitate but not heal, communicate with spirits of the dead, or clairvoyantly find prey, would not be regarded as a genuine shaman, even though some shamans can also levitate. After their initiation experiences, shamans are effectively obliged to

develop socially useful psi abilities such as healing. In modern societies these social pressures do not exist, although my research (Harvey-Wilson, 2000) found that, like shamans, many alien abductees become healers. This may be because healing can provide a useful outlet for any chaotic psi power they may develop after their abductions, and it could reduce the ridicule they might experience when it becomes known that they believe they have been abducted by aliens.

Almost all the psi abilities discussed in this chapter are anecdotal reports of spontaneous phenomena rather than from laboratory research, and parapsychologists would classify many of them as large-scale or macro-PK events. Cramer comments that researchers have

realised that the type of paranormal manifestations one can test in the laboratory are of a different nature and character to those seen in real-life situations. For this reason parapsychologists have distinguished between so-called 'lab psi' and spontaneous phenomena, the latter being of far greater intensity. (Cramer, 1979, p.228)

The fact that reports of other psi abilities have originated from so many different cultures and religions suggests that they have some validity, although a sceptic might claim that this consistency is the result of people attempting to demonstrate that their gods are as powerful as those of their rivals. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, any scientific hypothesis about the nature of reality that cannot explain certain anomalies is obviously incomplete. These psi reports are therefore an invitation for further research. Another reason for discussing this range of psi abilities is that together they may provide a wider perspective on the nature of psi and its relationship to other forces in the world. For example, physicists investigating the reality of human levitation could ponder whether anti-gravity forces exist, but after reading a report where the levitating person also appeared to teleport, they might adopt a wider and more productive approach. The physicist Professor John Hasted (1981) suggests that there might be more than one explanation for the levitation of furniture and people. He writes that "there is the possibility of a continual rapid series of teleportation events, each to a position very slightly removed from its predecessor; this would produce the appearance of a continuous movement or suspension" (p.203). This does not explain how teleportation or levitation works, but Hasted could not have suggested that the two are connected if he had not read about both types of psi phenomena. The main psi abilities that this chapter discusses are teleportation, healing, radiance, fire invulnerability, interaction with animals and weather control.

## 5.1 Shamanism

In indigenous societies a child may be apprenticed to a shaman because he or she seems to have innate visionary or psi abilities, while others only appear to develop these abilities after their initiation experiences. This raises the question of whether some psi abilities are genetic, which is discussed later. Shamans are people who seem to appreciate having as many powerful psi abilities as possible, although there do not exist many reports of shamans levitating. *Journey into the Beyond* (1992), filmed in 1984 by a German documentary crew, shows a shaman or witch-doctor called Nana Owaka (or Dwaku) levitating in a remote village in Togo, West Africa. Quoting the film crew, Childress (1986, p.171) explains that, after agreeing to demonstrate his ability to levitate, the shaman meditated for a whole day before sitting in a circle of dried leaves and twigs.

Just as the sun was setting, Owaka started to stir. A villager lit the circle of twigs and flames shot up. Drums began beating wildly — then we were hardly able to believe our eyes as Owaka stood and rose straight upward! It was as if he were being lifted on a pillow of air. He simply hung as if suspended, with nothing above or below him. (in Childress, 1986, p.171)

The crew filmed the levitation from two angles while Owaka remained in the air for about one minute before falling to the ground (p.171). The report does not mention whether Owaka demonstrated any other psi abilities, but as a shaman one can assume that he could also heal and communicate with spirits of the dead. It is also interesting to note that, like the Zulu shaman mentioned earlier who levitated a young man, Owaka had something burning near him when he levitated.

There are numerous reports that describe the range of shamans' psi abilities. Australian Aboriginal shamans sometimes demonstrate their abilities to young initiates. In New South Wales in 1882, Joe Dagan demonstrated his fire immunity and then lay on the ground and sang silently to himself.

As he sang, his magic cord came out of his body and rose in the air. Dagan then climbed the cord with his body in the same position as it was on the ground. When he got to the top, forty feet up [12.2 m], he waved to the people below. Then he sent his cord out and walked over to the next tree, and to the next. He came down the same way, like a spider on its thread, with his back to the ground. The cord then re-entered his body. (Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.105)

There are few other reports of shamans levitating this way. The cord may be a traditional technique, or something that Dagan materialised to make his levitation to such a height seem safer and less baffling.

Writing about Penobscot shamanism, the American anthropologist Frank G. Speck (1919/1974) mentions numerous psi abilities including levitation: the "Penobscot shaman seems to have been purely a wonder worker whose magic power was derived from the spiritual and animal world. His chief activity was to overcome rivals and demonstrate wherever he could the superiority of his own strength" (p.243). Speck collected his list of Penobscot abilities "from myths in my collection of texts, from specific shaman anecdotes ... and from direct tradition" (p.256), and points out that many of these skills were also attributed to neighbouring tribes.

We find accordingly that shamans are accredited with the power to kill or injure creatures by pointing the finger at them, to prove their strength over rivals either in combat or in contest, to escape from their enemies by magic means, to spy on enemies, to imprint their footprints in hard surfaces, to increase or diminish their size, to spoil the luck of trappers and hunters, to cause thick ice to heave, to pass through barriers (doors and the like), to roll away a heavy rock, to lift themselves from the floor, to foresee the approach of strangers, to remain beneath water, to force rivals to throw off their animal disguises, to render themselves invisible, and so on. (Speck, 1919/1974, p.256)

While it is unlikely that any one shaman possessed all these abilities, there exist reports of similar abilities in other parts of the world. In such a list the capacity to lift oneself from the floor seems fairly insignificant, which might explain the paucity of shamanic levitation reports. Compared with healing, levitation serves no social function other than to demonstrate one's prowess, hence Speck's (1919/1974) comments that shamans "frequently practised their art for amusement" (p.249). Speck provides an anecdote about Edmund Francis, a Penobscot shaman who died in 1914.

He boasts, or they say that he did once, of being able to cross his legs on a chair and then lift himself from the floor by pulling up on the rungs of the chair. He tells that once he made camp on the banks of a distant stream. When he got ready to leave he started to jump across, the stream being quite wide. Half way over he remembered that he had left behind his axe and in mid-air turned about, grabbed the axe and finished his jump without alighting. (Speck, 1919/1974, p.267)

Although no witnesses are mentioned, the fact that Francis claims to have picked up his axe suggests that, if true, this is an example of levitation rather than a visionary or out-of-body experience. Other psi abilities mentioned by Speck that seem related to levitation are the capacity to walk on water or to make other objects lighter. For example, being able to roll away a heavy rock probably involves mass control. Speck reports that one shaman supposedly had the "power to lift up and throw a boulder of great size" (1919/1974, p.265, footnote).

**Weather Control.** Shamans probably learn to control the weather because, as with healing, it affects people's welfare and may even save lives. The most common example of shamanic weather control is the rain dance. As Eliade (1951/1989, p.304) writes "it is known that the [Paviotso] shaman can bring rain, halt the clouds, melt the ice of rivers, simply by singing or shaking a feather". Kalweit (1992, p.119), too, claims that "Hundreds of anecdotes about shamans influencing the weather are scattered in books, magazines and travel accounts". Referring to the *yékamus* [shamans] of the Yamana of Tierra del Fuego, Kalweit states that

as various ethnographers assure us, the weather could be calmed as soon as a *yékamus* deigned to make use of his influence. In the *loimayekamus*, the Yamana school for medicine men, several medicine men always banded together to keep the weather favourable. When the ... food supplies were menaced by storms, only the *yékamus* were able to avert the danger. (Kalweit, 1992, p.118)

Vitebsky (1995, p.88) claims that the shamans in Nepal "lift one finger to make the snow fall and the other to make it stop ... [and] can turn back a bolt of lightning even after it has set a house ablaze". Max Freedom Long (1954) discovered that traditional Hawaiian kahunas (shamans) control the weather by raising one's inner self to a higher level so that it becomes a High Self (p.356). Because all High Selves are linked, "an appeal for weather control can be made through one's own High Self, who, supposedly, passes it on to the High Self in charge of weather in that vicinity" (p.356). Long explains that N.S. Emerson, a surveyor who worked in isolated parts of Hawaii, made friends with a kahuna who "'introduced' him several times to the invisible 'god' (*Aumakau*) who controlled the weather, and taught him to recite a ritual prayer to cause the winds to increase or decrease" (p.357). Emerson retained this ability for the rest of his life. His friends would seek "his help in quietening the weather when they wished to go by ship between the islands" (Long, 1954, p.358). He was also invariably asked to attend an annual school kite day so he could call up winds for the large kites. Witnesses claimed that the winds would arrive within ten minutes of Emerson praying for them (Long, 1954, p.358). Despite the anthropological evidence about shamans controlling the weather, Kalweit (1992) complains that little serious research has been conducted into the subject: "Ethnology ... must adopt the standards of the experimental sciences and make properly controlled investigations" (p.120).

**Fire Invulnerability.** Perhaps the most common examples of this ability are firewalking ceremonies. Shamans "are sometimes capable of handling fire-coals

without being burnt" (Drury, 1996, p.22), and Murphy (1992) writes that "Pavioso shamans of North America ... put burning embers in their mouths and touch red-hot irons" (p.467). In Halifax's opinion

The shaman's mastery of fire is related to the mastery of ecstasy. The contact with conditions of excessive cold or extreme heat indicates that the shaman has gone beyond the ordinary human condition and is now participating in the sacred world. The rousing of mystical heat in order to achieve fire-mastery is common to mystics and shamans the world over. The ability to withstand the rigours of a winter waterfall or the heat of burning embers is a manifestation of biological and spiritual maturation. (Halifax, 1982, p.88)

Generating internal heat is a biological function which can be controlled by yogic training (David-Neel, 1965, p.216), but withstanding temperatures that would normally burn skin appears to be a psi skill. Eliade (1951/1989, p.412) explains that 'inner heat' or 'mystical heat' refer to the psi capacity that ascetics, shamans, yogis and magicians may develop to perform miracles that transcend normal physical laws. If psi energy can create an insulating barrier around the body that is impervious to the flow of heat in either direction, then it could prevent a person from being burnt by hot coals, or the loss of body heat when sitting in the snow.

**Interaction with Animals.** Interacting closely with animals is to be expected in indigenous societies, such as in the jungles of the Amazon, and the evidence suggests that many shamans can communicate with animals on a spiritual or psi level. Harner (1990) explains that some shamanic myths claim that in the past humans and animals were related and could communicate easily, but that over time that link has eroded: "While the mythical paradise of animal-human unity is lost in ordinary reality, it still remains accessible in nonordinary reality to the shaman and vision-seeker" (p.57). As mentioned earlier, Matthew Manning's PK abilities appear to derive from his limbic system, which can be regarded "as the old animal brain" (Manning & Rose, 1999, p.68). Manning quotes Whitton as saying that the psychic power coming from this part of his brain is "not a random gift, but an innate function and ability in the brain of homo sapiens, a function probably lost or defunct in most people for thousands of years" (p.68), which might explain why shamans — who are always seeking to maintain or strengthen their psi powers — develop such a close affinity with animals. Shamans often see birds as representative of the human soul; for example, Navaho mythology claims that after death the soul "assumes the form of an owl" (Saunders, 1995, p.51). During

ceremonies shamans frequently wear animal skins or costumes and some claim to be able to turn themselves into animals:

the shaman can become a fish or a bird, a reindeer or a whale. In Amazonia, a shaman can become a jaguar by taking an exceptionally large dose of *viho* snuff. When he dies the shaman may turn permanently into a jaguar. (Vitebsky, 1995, p.91)

Harner (1990, p.58) explains that in North America a shaman's guardian spirit may be referred to as a 'power animal'. This spirit links the shaman "with the power of the animal world, the mammals, birds, fish, and other beings" (p.58). Animals may even manifest as humans when the shaman is in a shamanic state of consciousness (p.59). Eliade (1951/1989, p.460) notes that "imitating the gait of an animal or putting on its skin was acquiring a superhuman mode of being. ... By becoming this mythical animal, man became something far greater and stronger than himself". A power animal may increase a shaman's physical energy, alertness, self confidence and ability to resist diseases (Harner, 1990, p.69). In environments where game may be scarce or hard to find, the shaman may use his or her clairvoyant abilities to locate them for the local hunters (Eliade, 1951/1989, p.459). Long (1954) reports that in Samoa the locals used to conduct ceremonies that summoned sharks and turtles from the deep into shallow water by communicating with the relevant High Selves (p.359).

## 5.2 Spirit possession

In many possession reports the demoniac manifests numerous psi abilities, including levitation, which may intensify during the exorcism ritual and then cease. Unlike shamans, whose abilities are generally voluntary, demoniacs' psi powers appear to be involuntary and often aggressive or harmful. Gordon (1996, p.162) and Rickard (1977, p.13) report the 1970s case of Sister Rosa, a possessed Italian nun who experienced an alarming range of psi events around at the time of her exorcism by Don Franco Bartolomiello. An iron bar detached itself from a door and seemed to teleport through walls into her cell and then started beating her as she slept. "Kitchen knives flew from a table to her cell and tried to stab her" (Gordon, 1996, p.162). Don Franco reported that during the exorcism some string rose out of his pocket and twisted around Sister Rosa's neck as if it was trying to strangle her. On another occasion,

on hearing screams from Sister Rosa's cell, [the sisters] rushed in to find her tearing at her cowl. When they removed it they found thorns from a cactus plant in their garden firmly embedded in her scalp. They

[the thorns] resisted all attempts to remove them until they were washed with Holy water. (Rickard, 1977, p.13)

Rickard (1977) suggests that, as in some cases of poltergeist activity, these events were possibly being directed by Sister Rosa's unconscious mind: "We note that the thorns could have been a literal attempt to recreate Christ's 'Crown of Thorns', and the knife-attack Christ's 'ferita' or chest-wound" (p.13). He further notes that using physical objects "to reproduce the Stigmata is quite novel, ... usually some kind of psychosomatic process forms Christ's wounds directly in the stigmatic's body tissues" (p.13). Rickard (1977) points out that "beatings and persecutions ... are often stimulated by an obsessive meditation on the sufferings of Christ" (p.13). The most extraordinary event occurred when the convent sisters saw Sister Rosa "rise up in the air, float slowly up to the ceiling — and pass right through it" (Gordon, 1996, p.162). Monsignor Remigio Ragonese, the Auxiliary Bishop of Rome, insists that the report is true and that the sisters found Sister Rosa standing on the floor above (p.162). In line with Rickard's comments, Sister Rosa's levitation and teleportation to the room might be symbolic of Christ's ascent to heaven. The fact that they blended together so well suggests that the same psi force controlled both.

During their exorcisms, the bodies of some demoniacs undergo extraordinary physical changes. For example, Anna Ecklund's

face became horribly disfigured and distorted, often suffusing with blood as her head swelled and elongated, her eyes bulged and her lips grew, reportedly, to the size of hands. Her abdomen would swell to the point of bursting, only to retract and become so hard and heavy that the iron bedstead would bend under the enormous weight. (Guiley, 1989, p.110)

This seems to be excessive gravitation, and although the other symptoms may be largely psychosomatic, that does not explain what triggers them or why they do not produce permanent physical disfigurement. Another psi phenomenon that often occurs during exorcism rituals is that "waves of heat and cold pour over the room" (Guiley, 1989, p.87). A distinct chill may also be noticed in certain rooms in so-called haunted houses, and Fodor (1933/1966, p.406) observes that "winds, breezes, currents of air, [and] cooling of temperature is a well observed séance room phenomenon" which "usually precedes and heralds strong physical phenomena". In experiments with a medium at the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, Harry Price discovered a connection between PK phenomena and a maximum temperature drop of about 10 C degrees (in Fodor (1933/1966, p.407), and Carrington (1946/1973, p.57) reports that the drop occurred within a few



seconds. Peter Plesch (1999, p.217) calculates that the energy obtained from a drop of 10 C degrees in a volume of three cubic metres is equivalent to "the kinetic energy of an 80 kg object moving at 100 metres per second, which is equivalent to 360 km per hour". This is easily enough energy to levitate a person, but, as Plesch notes, it does not explain the mechanism "whereby material is cooled below the temperature of its surroundings" or how the energy "could be converted to the directed motion of a flying object" (p.218). It does, however, support the suggestion that whatever lies behind psi phenomena links consciousness, matter and energy.

**Healing.** Demoniacs are not reported to be able to heal people; instead one could say that during the exorcism they are being psychologically or spiritually healed either by the psi abilities of the exorcist, by divine power, by the departure of the possessing spirit, or they are unconsciously healing themselves with the power of their religious faith. The Catholic exorcist Father Gabriele Amorth claims that "Many times women have come to me before undergoing surgery for ovarian cysts. After the benediction, the pain stopped; a new sonogram showed the absence of any cyst, and surgery was cancelled" (in Chenery, 2004, p.16). He also claims "that his mentor, Father Candido, cured illnesses, including even medically verified brain tumours, simply with his blessing" (p.16). These claims illustrate the difficulty in verifying healing reports. While it is possible that an exorcist has innate healing abilities, other possible explanations are that the illnesses were psychosomatic, that they had gone into remission, or had been incorrectly diagnosed.

**Interaction with Animals.** There are several references to animals in the literature on spirit possession, but not many about animal communication. One of the symptoms of demonic possession is that the person may make animal sounds and movements, which is reminiscent of shamanism. "Many medieval sufferers believed they were vicious animals, most often wolves. Some resorted to running on all fours and even tearing at their victims with their teeth. From such stories arose the myths of lycanthropy or werewolves" (Guiley, 1989, p.91). During his interview, Kevin, who is an Anglican priest, told how, when working in a country town, some men arrived at his church holding a woman who they claimed needed help because she was involved in witchcraft and had the spirit of a panther in her. When they let her out of the car, "she actually roared around the church grounds on all fours, roaring like a panther". Kevin was not sure what to do, "So I just said a prayer and she just flopped on the ground". Kevin did not see the woman again so

is not sure whether she was drugged, psychologically disturbed, or genuinely possessed by the spirit of a panther.

Another symptom of possession is allotriophagy, which refers to vomiting bizarre substances or objects. In the Middle Ages this supposedly included the disgorgement of "anything from live animals, such as toads, snails, worms or butterflies, to pieces of iron, nails, small files, pins, needles, feathers, stones, cloth, shards of glass, hair, seaweed or foam" (Guiley, 1989, p.8). A modern collection of such objects (Chenery, 2004, p.16) includes a couple of small plastic dinosaurs, although it is possible that the possessed person(s) had previously swallowed them. In the Middle Ages some people alleged that their possession was the result of bewitchment by a witch's imp or familiar, which usually assumed the form of an animal such as a cat, toad, owl, mouse, or dog (Guiley, 1989, p.121; Oldridge, 2000, p.62). Others claimed "to be menaced by devilish apparitions in the form of animals" (Oldridge, 2000, 142). Dr Susan Greenwood explains that

The origin of ideas about familiars may lie in a belief in nature spirits — dwarves, elves, fairies etc — and, going farther back in time to our common shamanic heritage, to when shamans communicated with the spirits of the animals that their community was to hunt. (Greenwood, 2002, p.100)

Like shamans, witches were believed to be able to transform themselves and others into animals. They might do this to pass unnoticed, to torment people, or to fly to sabbats (Guiley, 1989, p.230). The devil was also often claimed to appear in animal form: "When Satan was mentioned by witnesses in witch trials he was often described as an animal" (Oldridge, 2000, p.59). Artistic representations of the devil frequently portray him as an animal, for example as a goat, with horns, a tail and cloven feet (Néret, 2003; Pickering, 1998, p.218).

### **5.3 Poltergeist Activity**

Whether one believes that poltergeist activity is caused by spirits or projected PK energy from the unconscious mind, the phenomenon is largely defined by the occurrence of disturbing psi events and is considered resolved when they stop, or the PK energy is refocussed into a useful activity such as healing. The range of psi events that occur during poltergeist activity is probably as varied as in any of the other groups, although they frequently happen when no one is looking. For example, if a utensil flies across the kitchen, those in the room may be unsure whether it was thrown by a person or an invisible force, but, once normal causes

have been excluded, events that occur when no one is present are almost certainly the result of spirits or projected PK. Gault and Cornell (1979, p.226) provide a list of the most common poltergeist events. Objects may move or fly through the air or seem to pass through walls or ceiling; people may be thrown around; raps, noises or voices may be heard; fires may start; pools of water may appear; electrical devices may malfunction; curtains or bedclothes may be disturbed; metal objects may be bent or broken; doors and windows may jam or open; writing may appear on walls; plants may be uprooted or damaged; and filth may be smeared around and offensive smells may occur. There often seems to be a human-like intelligence behind these events. For example, after returning to a locked house, small objects may be neatly arranged in a pattern on the floor, or a door will open when someone approaches. The English spirit medium, the Reverend Stainton Moses (1839-1892), who sometimes levitated, would often find his bedroom belongings "arranged in the shape of a cross" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.249).

The poltergeist intelligence sometimes has a sense of humour or, as Colin Wilson (1981, p.146) notes, it acts like "a mad practical joker; the mentality seems to be that of an idiot child". The Black Monk of Pontefract case in the late 1960s in Yorkshire provides some examples. The family concerned were Jean and Joe Pritchard and their son Phillip (15) and daughter Diane (12). After the poltergeist had received some media publicity, Joe's sister Maude arrived, determined to show that there was a logical explanation to the activity. The family was mildly annoyed at her scepticism, and while they were all sitting in the kitchen, the room suddenly became cold, a familiar symptom that something was about to happen. The refrigerator door swung open and a "jug of milk floated out, sailed across the kitchen until it was poised above Aunt Maude's head, then tilted and slowly deluged her in milk" (Wilson, 1981, p.153). Later, while they were preparing for bed, Aunt Maude's fur gloves appeared around the door as if a huge invisible person was wearing them. Maude threw one of her boots at the door, but the gloves floated into the bedroom. One of them "clenched into a fist, and shook threateningly in Aunt Maude's direction who responded by bursting into 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' At this, the gloves began to conduct her singing, beating in time" (Wilson, 1981, p.155). Although this resembles human motivation, it could be caused by someone's unconscious mind or the spirit of a dead person.

Rogo (1990) gives an example where the poltergeist appears to respond to a challenge. In 1948 a Bavarian couple and their fourteen-year-old daughter "were bombarded by everything from stones to work tools as they lay in bed" (p.126). One day the mother

collected all the poltergeist-teleported items, which had been scattered helter-skelter during a previous bombardment, and placed them in a toolbox. Then she sat on the box in defiance of the poltergeist. Yet, even as she did so, the same items ... started dropping down from the ceiling, in front of her. They were soon scattered all over the floor. The witness thereupon opened the toolbox, only to find it empty. (Rogo, 1990, p.126)

If scientists ever learn how this sort of teleportation works it may revolutionise the world we live in. Matthew Manning reports that on one occasion

I was collecting material for a Guy Fawkes fire at the bottom of our garden. Finding myself short of rubbish, except for half a dozen cardboard boxes, I went to the house and asked my mother what I could use. There was no one else at home and she had no idea or suggestion. I returned to the bottom of the garden, and to my utter amazement I found a stack of large logs and wood placed next to the cardboard boxes. (Manning, 1974, p.98)

Manning, who thinks that the wood "materialized as a result of my wishing" (p.98), is a good example of a person whose childhood poltergeist experiences seemed to be the result of his own innate psi abilities. As mentioned earlier, Manning learnt to channel some of the poltergeist energy into automatic writing and drawing. Then, like a shaman, he directed it into healing, and is now one of England's leading healers (Manning, 1999), which supports the theory that poltergeist activity is unconsciously projected PK power. Psi healing is regarded as a form of PK, so Manning seems to have converted unconscious, chaotic PK into deliberate, focussed PK. Once again, this suggests that psi power is undifferentiated at its most fundamental level but, because of its consciousness component, can be deliberately focussed into specific abilities.

#### **5.4 Spiritualism**

Unlike spirit possession or poltergeist activity, spirit mediums generally welcome the development of voluntary or involuntary psi powers. There are numerous examples of powerful physical mediums displaying a range of PK abilities apart from levitation. According to Fodor (1933/1966, p.155) Mrs Agnes Guppy produced an enormous variety of apports during the hundreds of séances she held in London. Sitters would often ask for unusual objects to be materialised. Some of these were so large or bizarre and appeared in such abundance that it seems most unlikely

that Mrs Guppy could have produced them using sleight-of-hand. For example, when one sitter asked for a sunflower, "one six feet high with a mass of earth around the roots fell upon the table" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.155). Other objects that appeared during her career as a medium were: twenty prickly cactus plants; stinging nettles; eels and lobsters; butterflies; showers of feathers; and on one occasion three duck carcasses ready for cooking (p.155). Apart from how this could be possible, one question is whether an apport such as the sunflower was materialized by spirits or invisibly teleported from someone's garden. Dong and Raffill (1997, p.151) give an example where, while testing the PK abilities of some Chinese 'super psychics', a researcher found that the materialized flower bud of a rare breed of tea plant had been teleported from his own garden.

Mrs Guppy's teleportation occurred in June 1871 at a séance in the London house of the medium Charles Williams (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.392). The ten sitters did not include Mrs Guppy. Although it was light outside, the séance was held in darkness as a result of the doors and thick curtains being closed. When a sitter asked one of the spirit controls to apport them something, another jokingly said "I wish you would bring Mrs Guppy" (p.393). A while later there was a heavy bump on the table and a couple of screams. Fodor continues,

A match was then struck, and there was Mrs Guppy on the table with the whole of the sitters seated round it closely packed together as they sat on commencement. Mrs Guppy appeared to be in a trance, and was perfectly motionless. ... She had one arm over her eyes, and was arrayed in a loose morning gown with a pair of bedroom slippers on, and in a more or less décolleté condition. ... There was a pen in one hand, which was down by her side. From the first mention of bringing her to the time she was on the table three minutes did not elapse. (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.393)

Mrs Guppy was rather upset at having arrived so poorly dressed, but the séance continued with her as an extra sitter. Afterwards, "Mr Harrison, editor of *The Spiritualist*, with three of the sitters offered to escort Mrs Guppy to her home" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.393) which was "a distance of over three miles" [nearly five km] away. There they discovered that, before the incident, a friend "had been sitting with Mrs Guppy near the fire making up accounts when suddenly looking up she found that her companion had disappeared, leaving a slight haze near the ceiling." Mrs Guppy could not have entered the séance room without letting in some light, and a woman of her size could not have climbed onto the séance table in the dark without assistance. She was probably fully conscious while doing her

accounts, yet appeared at the séance in a trance, which suggests that the teleportation put her in an ASC, perhaps to enable her psi abilities to blend more efficiently with those of the medium and/or spirits that caused the event.

As well as being the most famous levitating medium, Home also displayed a range of other psi abilities. Lord Adare, the Earl of Dunraven, who attended many of Home's séances, describes some psi events that he witnessed. On one occasion, while in a trance, Home, who often roamed around during his séances, put his hands on Adare's shoulders and, "I felt a strong current of heat flow out of his hands into my shoulders. ... It was very hot indeed" (Adare, 1969, p.37). Although Home was not regarded as a healer, a sensation of heat is often experienced by people receiving psi healing. Home often underwent temporary physical elongation. Once, at a séance, Adare observed that Home, who was normally 5 foot 10 inches [1.78 m], grew to about 6 foot 4 or 6 inches [1.93 or 1.98 m]. Adare, who had an empirical approach, felt Home's feet to ensure that he was not levitating, whereupon Home unbuttoned his coat and Adare discovered that

He was elongated from his waist upwards, there was a space of, I suppose, 4 inches [10 cm] between his waistcoat and the waistband of his trousers. He appeared to grow in breadth and size all over but there was no way of testing this. (Adare, 1969, p.38)

Home could also elongate his arms. On another occasion, having put pencil marks on a wall to measure their length, Adare concluded that Home's total arm-span elongation was 9½ inches [24 cm] (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.124). At another séance, while lying on the floor, Home's elongated body was measured at 7 feet [2.13 m] long (p.124). If the human body can temporarily elongate to this extent, the anatomical complexity would be daunting, especially as Home could communicate and move around while it was happening. This suggests that whatever intelligence was mediating the elongation had access to relevant physiological information about the correct functioning of the body. This information would probably also be needed during psi healing. In technology terms, the processing of this information would probably require large amounts of computing power, quite apart from the biological precision of the PK involved.

Home manifested numerous other psi abilities when in a trance; birds would be heard flying around the séance room, musical instruments would play by themselves, furniture would levitate, he seemed to speak other languages (xenoglossy) and he could make a glass of brandy lose its taste (Adare, 1969, p.41).

Some mediums are better at xenoglossy than others. Eric Post (1946) claims that, when in a trance, Miss Laura Edmunds was able to deliver messages "in thirteen languages, including Polish, Hindu, Greek and others. In a normal state she spoke only English and a little French" (p.117).

During her interview, Maude, a spirit medium who claims to have levitated several times, reported that once while she was sitting in daylight in an open group of Spiritualists, the others "became quite concerned because they saw this light begin to glow around me and when they looked the chair was empty and I wasn't even there". The others then said protection prayers for the group and the church they were in and, "after a certain length of time, not immediately, I quietly and slowly came back". Maude, who was in a meditative state, was not aware that she had become invisible, which raises the question of whether people to whom this happens have ceased to be physically present or are merely invisible. No one from Maude's group felt to see if her body was there. American researcher Donna Higbee (1995) has published reports from several people who claim to have undergone temporary 'Involuntary Spontaneous Human Invisibility', but has not discovered what causes the phenomenon.

**Fire Invulnerability.** Like some shamans, while in a trance Home often demonstrated the ability to resist being burnt. As Adare writes,

Home went to the fire, poked up the coals, and putting his hand in, drew out a hot burning ember, about twice the size of an orange; this he carried about the room, as if to show it to the spirits, and then brought it to us; we all examined it. He then put it back in the fire and showed us his hands; they were not in the least blackened or scorched, neither did they smell of fire. (Adare, 1969, p.39)

Home returned to the fireplace "then kneeling down, he placed his face right among burning coals, moving it about as though bathing in water" (p.39). Home could also briefly confer fire invulnerability on others. At the same séance, he picked up the large coal again and asked Adare to hold out his hand.

I did so, and having made two rapid passes over my head, he placed the coal in it. I must have held it for half a minute, long enough to have burned my hand fearfully; the coal felt scarcely warm. Home then took it away". (Adare, 1969, p.39)

One assumes that the passes over the head conferred the fire invulnerability, because another sitter who did not receive any passes burnt his finger when he touched the coal. Although he claims that the matter has not been seriously

researched, Inglis (1986) reports that in the 1880s it was shown that hypnosis "subjects put into a deep trance displayed heat resistance. If told that they were being touched with a pencil, they would show no sign either of pain or, later, of the effects of a burn" (p.168). Home could also confer fire invulnerability on inanimate objects. He once "placed a hot coal on his hostess's white muslin dress without harming it. Next he took some white flowers from a vase on the table and held them in the fire. ... The flowers remained undamaged" (Gaddis, 1968, p.103).

**Radiance.** One reason that séances are normally held in darkness is that they often feature luminous phenomena such as floating balls or stars of light. While "the medium was lying back, apparently insensible in an easy chair," Sir William Crookes (1874/1972, p.91) describes seeing "a solid self-luminous body, the size and nearly the shape of a turkey's egg, float noiselessly about the room". It was visible for ten minutes and hit the table three times "with a sound like that of a hard, solid body". Post (1946) claims that these lights "never illuminate the space surrounding them; they cast no shadows, brilliant as they may be" (p.91). Fodor (1933/1966, p.208) reports that "Solid objects afforded no obstacles to one's view of the lights. If they appeared under a mahogany table they could be seen from above just as well as if the top of the table had been composed of glass". Sometimes light was seen emanating from the body or head of a medium. "Tongues or jets of flame" (Adare, 1969, p.45) were once seen coming from Home's head, and on another occasion "he was elongated and raised in the air simultaneously, and the top of his head became quite luminous, giving the appearance of a halo" (Burton, 1948, p.195). Columns of light, luminous crosses and halos were also seen at Stainton Moses' séances (Fodor (1933/1966, p.208).

**Healing.** The role of healing in Spiritualism has changed. In Victorian times, when séances were widespread, famous mediums such as Home were not seen as healers despite their astonishing PK abilities. Books that document Spiritualism in that era seldom mention healing (eg: Burton, 1948; Marryat, 1891/1973; Pearsall, 1972; Post, 1946). This apparent disinterest in healing may have been because Spiritualism was an exciting novelty that supposedly revealed the existence of life-after-death, thus perhaps reducing some people's concerns about mortality. In modern Spiritualism healing is important and several of the Spiritualists interviewed for this research work as healers. In her sociological study of Spiritualism, Vieda Skultans (1974) concludes that "Much of spiritualist activity is concerned with



healing and giving advice about sickness" (p.30), although she notes that Spiritualism "does not assert its supremacy over orthodox medicine. Spiritualists are seldom discouraged from seeing their doctor and they are rarely given advice which contradicts that of the doctor" (p.30).

The English Spiritualist National Union (SNU, 2004a) has a Healing Committee and guidelines for those wishing to become spiritual healers. Whether they heal by the laying on of hands or praying from a distance, Spiritualists believe that healing powers come from spirits. Although there are many powerful spiritual healers worldwide, scientific validation is hampered by sceptical medical practitioners who claim that patients may not have been sick in the first place, or that the illness has gone into remission, or was psychosomatic. Nevertheless, of all the psi abilities possessed by Spiritualists and other levitators, healing is the most popular and comprehensively researched (Dossey, 1999; Krippner & Villoldo, 1986), and may pave the way to a more widespread acceptance of some psi powers.

**Interaction with animals.** During his interview, the medium Oliver explained that a lady had once asked if he could communicate with her beloved dead dog. When he managed to do so, Oliver was amazed that the dog's spirit could provide him with information "that only she and the dog would know". His explanation is that they can "communicate with us because animals have a spirit exactly the same as we do". Other explanations are that Oliver was clairvoyantly accessing information about the dog from its owner, or that, if he was really interacting with the dog's spirit, his own mind was perhaps converting the dog's visual images into words.

The Spiritualist literature has few references to animals, but Bentine (1981) provides the example of Eddie Partridge who ran a small grocer's shop in Dover. Partridge, who was born with psi abilities, was "barely literate" (p.72) but, after praying, always managed to get his accounts correct. He bred champion racing pigeons, was a spirit medium and an outstanding healer. One summer evening in 1939, Partridge persuaded Bentine and his father to drive a few miles into a sheltered valley in the Kent countryside. He then led them to a small clearing in some woods. Standing in the moonlit silence, Eddie gestured for them to listen.

Then he turned and, in a low voice, halfway between a whistle and a word, gave one strange, short, gentle call. Immediately, from every corner of the wood, the birds, the beasts, even the insects and, I felt, every tree and plant answered him! ... There was no 'alarm' in that

spontaneous answer — just a massive response of nature to nature: like attracting like. (Bentine, 1981, p.80)

This incident suggests that, like a shaman, Partridge could telepathically interact with animals, which probably explains why he was such a successful pigeon breeder. Although not a levitator, Partridge's psi abilities resemble those of Joseph of Cupertino. Both could easily communicate with animals and were almost illiterate, which suggests that when one aspect of a person's consciousness is less dominant, another part can more easily develop.

### **5.5 Alien Abductions**

In what can be seen as the opposite of Partridge's joyous moonlight communication with nature, one aspect of the Oz Factor, which often occurs just prior to a UFO close encounter in the countryside, is that something resembling a 'cone of silence' seems to descend on the surrounding area (Bryan, 1995, p.68). This sudden and mysterious silencing of insects, frogs and birds is often what causes someone to look around and see a UFO in the vicinity. This suggests that some UFOs radiate an anomalous, possibly psi-related, energy field which the local wildlife can sense.

As mentioned previously, it is unclear whether abductees are selected because they already have psi abilities or whether their close encounters bestow these abilities. It is possible that the ASCs abductees experience during their encounters can create or strengthen psi talents. On the other hand, if Home could so easily confer fire invincibility on his sitters, then perhaps aliens deliberately or inadvertently confer some of their psi abilities on abductees. After their encounters, some abductees experience poltergeist-like activity around them (Harvey-Wilson, 2000) which in indigenous societies would be seen as evidence of a link between the neophyte shaman and the spirit world. But it confuses many abductees because Western culture does not offer any similar explanations. Most of the PK incidents are minor, but some suggest an intelligence at work; for example, one abductee reported that her stereo would switch on in the middle of the night, play her favourite song and then turn itself off. In his comparison of NDEs and abductions, Ring (1992, p.156) adopts the term Electrical Sensitive Syndrome, based on Shallis' (1988, p.17) research into 'electrical sensitives'. Symptoms of the syndrome are that the psi or bioelectric energy that abductees seem to develop after their close encounters appears to interfere with electrical devices, especially if they are feeling agitated; for example, light bulbs and radios frequently malfunction,

computers crash and street lights go out when abductees walk under them. These symptoms seem to reinforce the apparent connection between psi phenomena and electromagnetism.

**Healing.** The majority of the abductees that I interviewed (Harvey-Wilson, 2000) have developed healing abilities, which mirrors Manning's transition from poltergeist activity to healing. Little research has been done to ascertain what percentage of abductees in other parts of the world have become healers and, if so, how effective their psi powers are. In addition to abductees developing healing skills, there is evidence that aliens have powerful healing abilities. Preston Dennett (1996a, 1996b) claims that a number of people who have experienced close encounters report that they were healed of ailments ranging from minor afflictions such as back pain or fever, to serious ones such as cancer or a heart condition. These claims cannot be verified without prior knowledge of who is going to be abducted, but if they are true, there are several possible explanations. Out of compassion aliens may use advanced medical techniques or psi abilities on sick abductees; they may be using humans as experimental medical subjects; or the cures may be the coincidental result of abductees being pulled into ASCs during their abductions. Given that there are numerous similarities between shamanism and alien abductions, it may be relevant that in shamanism there exists the concept of initiation illness, in which a potential shaman suffers from a seemingly incurable ailment until he or she accepts the call to the shamanic vocation, whereupon the affliction rapidly heals. As Eliade (1951/1989) writes "the election of a shaman is manifested by a comparatively serious illness. ... But the future shaman is cured in the end, with the help of the same spirits that will later become his tutelaries and helpers" (p.23). Perhaps the aliens involved in repeat abductions are the equivalent of tutelaries and helpers, especially as some abductee healers claim that various spirits, including aliens, assist them in their healing work. Some repeat abductees also claim to be part of an alien health-monitoring program in which they are told which foods to eat and which to avoid (Mack, 2000a, p.249).

**Interaction with animals.** There are several animal connections in ufology. A few ufologists have even suggested that some UFOs are living animals propelled by PK energy (Gaddis, 1968, p.27). Alvin Lawson (2001, pp.35-49) classifies encountered aliens into six types: human, humanoid, animal, robot, exotic and apparitional. The animal category is rare and varies enormously; they normally

adopt an erect stance, have an unpleasant odour and communicate by growls or telepathy. The most common animal aliens are 'reptoids' or reptilians (Kottmeyer, 2001b, pp.488-491). The few reptilians that are reported "are invariably bipedal with a human torso" (p.488) and some abductees claim to have had sexual encounters with them (p.490), which is reminiscent of traditional Christian reports of encounters with the devil, who was often portrayed in bipedal animal form. Some ufologists suggest that a few of these historical reports were actually alien encounters being interpreted in demonic terms. A few other aliens are described as resembling insects such as praying mantises (Jacobs, 1998, p.94). Mack (2000a) writes that "Deer, racoons, cats, panthers, owls, eagles, snakes, and spiders are among the animals that abductees have encountered in their experiences" (p.139), although, because the animal's eyes can seem too big, they may conclude "that another kind of being was represented in this particular form" (p.139). As an explanation for aliens appearing as animals, Bernado Peixoto, a South American shaman, anthropologist and abductee, states that "The beings seem to take a form that is familiar to human beings ... perhaps the animal spirit with which the person is most connected" (in Mack, 2000a, p.140). In another apparent link to shamanism, most of the abductees that I interviewed report that since their close encounters they have developed an animistic perspective which includes a heightened sensitivity to animals and the environment (Harvey-Wilson, 2000). It is as if, like shamans, their consciousness has expanded so that they can now communicate telepathically with aliens, spirits and animals, including pets.

**Weather control.** Apart from Dr Jeffrey Mishlove (2000), there is little evidence that abductees develop an ability to control the weather. Mishlove's book describes his research into the powers of Ted Owens (1920-1987) who claimed to be able to control the weather as a result of his ability to communicate with 'space intelligences'. Owens claimed that he levitated on several occasions. The first time was when he was four; he was playing outside when he "began to float up the side of the house, way up to the top of the house" (in Mishlove, 2000, p.45). The next occasion was at a country club swimming pool when he was thirteen.

I climbed up on the ten-foot [3.05 m] board and did a swan dive up in the air, spreading my arms out. Then I didn't come down. I was so astounded and amazed I couldn't believe it, but I kept my arms outstretched and it was the most wonderful, exhilarating feeling I'd ever had in my life. (in Mishlove, 2000, p.45)

While climbing out of the pool a friend asked Owens how he had managed to stay in the air for so long. During World War II Owens was in the US Navy in the Pacific.

One day I was outside on the ship's deck. ... I climbed up on a hatch. There must have been fifty or sixty men up there, lying around looking at the ocean. I gave a little jump to go down two or three feet [61 or 91 cm] off the hatch — and instead of coming down, I went up into the air and just sort of floated. All of the sailors were pointing and saying 'Look at that!' I was just floating and finally came down near the rail some distance away. (in Mishlove, 2000, p.48)

Owens claimed that he was a repeat abductee and that his innate psi abilities were greatly enhanced after he encountered a UFO in Texas in 1955 (Mishlove, 2000, p.64). To test Owens' weather control ability, Mishlove asked him to document what he was going to do and the time period during which it would occur. Mishlove was well aware that Owens' claims would only be believable if the subsequent weather patterns were unusual, and on numerous occasions they were. Mishlove estimates that over a five year period Owens' predictions of dire events "including earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and violent events worldwide" (p.111) were about 80% accurate. Because Owens was frequently angry that various authorities would not employ him to control the weather, he admitted that on several occasions he deliberately caused droughts or storms. In 1979 Owens said that he would direct a hurricane at Florida. Hurricane David formed in the Caribbean and headed towards the USA. A major disaster seemed inevitable, but, after Owens was persuaded to 'let go' of the hurricane, forecasters were baffled that, contrary to their expectations, David fizzled out (Mishlove, 2000, p.128). This is probably the largest form of PK ever investigated by a parapsychologist and reveals that psi abilities can be used for beneficial and destructive purposes. In December 1985, Owens told Mishlove that the space intelligences intended to destroy the space shuttle unless the next flight was cancelled, but Mishlove doubted the prediction. As he recalls, "However, a month later, on January, 1986, I was shaken to my bones when the Challenger disaster occurred. The space shuttle exploded, killing all seven crew members" (Mishlove, 2000, p.226). Although this does not prove that aliens were involved in the Challenger disaster, it suggests that it is unwise to ignore the psi abilities of abductees like Owens.

## **5.6 Martial Arts: Qigong**

Some advanced martial arts practitioners appear to develop psi abilities, such as extraordinary strength and the capacity to reduce or increase their weight. These abilities may blend indistinguishably with normal combat techniques, but some

exceptional masters have clearly observable PK powers. Morihei Uyeshiba was renowned for an ability which resembles teleportation. In a film taken of him in combat with two men he appears to turn and move about two feet [60 cm] away between two frames of the film (Murphy & White, 1978, p.100). As George Leonard reports,

Those who were best acquainted with the Master are convinced that he was operating 'in another dimension', especially in his last years. Again and again he seems to have 'just disappeared', or to have created 'a warp in time and space'. (Leonard, 1975, p.253)

Dong and Raffill (1996, p.28) explain that when qigong practitioners have learnt to focus their chi appropriately, contact with an opponent or a weapon the opponent is carrying will cause them to be "thrown to the ground as if feeling an electric shock". This 'empty force' can throw or injure a person from a distance, although it is unclear whether the energy is bioelectricity, psi power, or both. Long (1954, p.69) explains that traditional Hawaiian kahunas believed that the energy that they cultivated "had to do with all thought processes and bodily activity. It was the essence of life itself," which sounds like chi. The kahunas could hold "heavy wooden sticks in the hands and, by an effort of mind ... [cause] bodily electricity to enter a stick and charge it heavily" (p.69). This seems unlike electricity because dry wood is normally an insulator not a conductor. Long writes that

These sticks were formerly used in battle, the kahunas standing in the rear lines, charging large sticks, and then throwing them at one of the enemy. Upon contact with the sticks, even the strongest warriors were often made unconscious. (Long, 1954, p.69)

Long (1954) reports that the scientist Dr William Tufts Brigham tested these sticks and found that they could give a shock which "numbed the limb which was touched and made the head swim" (p.69). Long claims that "An early account in the [American] government archives tells how a medicine man exhibited his magic power by touching a strong brave on the chest with a forefinger, knocking him to the ground in an unconscious condition" (p.69). Similarly, Dong and Raffill (1996, p.29) describe the abilities of qigong master Wang Xiangzhai who, when challenged by a Japanese colonel, simply tossed him backwards without touching him. The colonel then challenged Wang to a knife fight, but "Wang just picked up a nearby stick. The ... fearsome Japanese master was sent flying. ... Still holding his knife, he was tossed up in the air and fell to earth several yards away". This form of chi may be the same energy that throws people and objects around in poltergeist activity.

Danaos (2000, p.22) points out that, by mixing yang and yin chi, advanced neikung practitioners can develop powerful abilities. As an engineer, Danaos always checks that he is not being tricked, and asserts that Master Chang's numerous psi abilities are genuine. For example, with no effort Chang is able to use the palm of his hand to push a chopstick through a plank of wood up to eight inches [20 cm] thick (Danaos, 2000, p.13). In San Francisco, Master Chang demonstrated his abilities to a local qigong master. He put two coins "in the centre of his palms and squeezed. He handed them back to the man folded in half" (p.96). When the man saw the folded coins, he was astounded. Chang then gave a razor to the qigong master "and asked him to cut him anywhere he liked. Try as he might, the man could not hurt John, even though ... he put all his power and emotion into it" (p.96). Apparently this was because, unlike Chang, the other man had only mastered yang but not yin chi (p.97) which can supposedly absorb other forms of energy. Master Chang claims that "When people walk on coals, it is yin ch'i that they are using. ... Sometimes it is the yin of their own bodies, sometimes it is the yin ch'i of spirits. The yin absorbs the yang of the fire" (in Danaos, 2000, p.110). To demonstrate the absorbing power of yin chi, Master Chang gets a student to hold his hand over the muzzle of an air rifle while he puts the "first knuckle of his right index finger into the small of [the student's] back" (p.111) to fill him with yin chi. After the rifle is fired, the pellet lies undamaged in the student's palm. Danaos checks that this is not sleight-of-hand by marking the lead pellets with a knife before they are fired.

Master Chang explains (in Danaos, 2000, p.19) that he can transmit his chi power from the palm of his hand in a shotgun effect, or from the tips of two fingers like a laser beam. To illustrate this he asked Danaos to choose a banana at random from a bowl of fruit, and then

He extended the index and middle fingers of his right hand, folding the other two into the thumb. Tensing briefly, he passed his hand in a slicing motion about three inches [7.5 cm] away from the banana; there was an audible *click*, and half the fruit fell to the floor. (Danaos, 2000, p.19)

Upon examination, Danaos noted that the end of the banana "was shiny, as if cleaved by a hot knife that had fused the surface ... into a glassy mass" (p.19). Although it is not clear whether this is the same psi energy that Master Chang uses when levitating, it does seem that it is equally capable of transcending what scientists regard as the normal laws of physics.

**Healing.** Because qigong is associated with health, longevity and the flow of chi within the body, advanced practitioners normally develop healing abilities along with their other psi talents. Dong (1984) claims that there exists an "inseparable relationship" (p.157) between qigong, psi abilities and acupuncture, because all three involve the flow of chi through the body. Dolic (2003, p.21) suggests that because aliens are reported to have numerous psi abilities, perhaps they are also great healers like qigong masters. As well as being able to levitate, Master Chang is a healer who supplements traditional acupuncture by passing his chi through the needles. Danaos (2000, p.6) claims that Chang has healed hundreds of people whom Western medicine cannot help.

**Interaction with animals.** There are few documented examples of martial arts practitioners interacting paranormally with animals. Guiley (1991) reports that during a mid-life mystical experience, Morihei Uyeshiba's "mind and body became light. He understood the birds and became aware of 'the mind of God'" (p.345), which suggests that he had entered a pantheistic state of transpersonal consciousness which enabled him to commune with animals. Harrison (1955) provides an example of a master who demonstrated his psi ability by staring steadfastly at some sparrows in a pine tree and then uttered a *kiai* or 'spirit art' shout "whereupon the birds fell to the ground insensible. When he relaxed the *kiai* the birds regained consciousness and flew away" (p.169). Similarly, Kalweit (1992) describes how a Passamaquoddy shaman, prior to demonstrating his PK ability to leave footprints in hard ground, "emitted a bone-rattling cry that paralysed everyone present and made them unable to talk" (p.123). In linking animals and healing, Hariman (2003) explains that "The Five Animal Qigong" was developed as a result of the belief that "animals appear to possess a spontaneous self-healing capacity, which can be activated and systematically utilized through certain rituals and movements" (p.22). In a technique reminiscent of shamanism, by imitating the movements and assuming the personalities of certain animals, qigong practitioners can supposedly learn to heal various ailments within themselves. For example, the tiger relates to the lungs, and the crane to the heart and blood circulation (p.22).

## 5.7 Mysticism

A large number of psi events are reported around various mystics, some of which are well-documented as a result of the Catholic Church's investigation process before a person is canonised. Inedia is the ability to survive on little or no food for



longer than medical authorities consider possible. Theresa Neumann (1889-1962) was a stigmatic who survived for many years on just Communion wafers (Murphy, 1992, p.503; Treece, 1993, p.180). She was investigated by the Church, but no evidence of fraud was found. At times she lost weight because of her considerable blood loss yet, without eating or drinking, her weight would return to normal a few days later (Murphy, 1992, p.504). In 2003, a team of doctors at Stirling hospital in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad studied a mystic called Prahlad Jani, 76, who claims not to have eaten or drunk anything for 68 years. "Jani, who lives in a cave, says he was blessed by a goddess at the age of eight and ever since has received 'the elixir of life from a hole in my palate'" ("Hermit", 2003). Jani was under observation (including video surveillance) for ten days in the hospital and "During that time he did not consume anything and 'neither did he pass urine or stool', according to the hospital's deputy superintendent, Dr Dinesh Desia" (Khanna, 2003). One can hypothesise that, in addition to the air they breathe, some form of spiritual energy provides these mystics with the nourishment that ordinary people obtain from food and water. But how is this possible? Do all humans have a latent mechanism that is capable of tuning in to this energy? If so, why do so many people die of starvation? Perhaps, as with other psi phenomena, access to a transpersonal level of consciousness is required to switch on this mechanism. Along these lines, Murphy (1992) suggests that "the body has access to superordinary energies that can be triggered by religious passion. ... Heroic fasting suggests that the body can reconstitute its elements in extraordinary ways, dramatically altering its habitual physiological activity" (p.505).

Bilocation occurs when someone is seen in two places at once. In 1774 "St Alphonsus Maria de'Ligouri was seen at the bedside of the dying Pope Clement XIV, when in fact the saint was confined to his cell in a location four days' journey away" (Guiley, 1991, p.57). These reports suggest a connection between bilocation and teleportation. Some definitions of bilocation claim that, rather than being simultaneously in two places, the mystic merely transmits a vision to a distant location (Treece, 1993, p.307). But some reports confirm that the mystic was physically in both locations. The Hindu mystic Yogananda (1946/1983, p.26) describes how he once sat with Swami Pranabandha, waiting for a friend of his father's to arrive at the swami's apartment. On arrival the friend told Yogananda that he had just met the swami down by the Ganges and had been asked to come to his apartment. The friend asserted that he had held the swami's hand for part of

the half hour walk before the swami had gone ahead saying that he had another task to attend to. While sitting with the swami, Yogananda noticed that he had entered a meditative trance, during which time he had apparently clairvoyantly located the friend and then bilocated himself in order to invite him to his home. This report reveals a link between ASCs and psi, and suggests that science's current understanding of the relationship between matter, consciousness and space-time is seriously incomplete.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), the founder of Christian Science, whose life has been well-documented, was a mystic with several psi abilities. As a child, when playing hide-the-thimble, she "could always go directly to the hidden thimble" wherever it was hidden (Braden, 1959, p.367). When Eddy was nine she used to hear voices calling her. When she eventually responded, "a curious lightness came over me. ... It seemed to me I was being lifted off my little bed, and I put out my hands and caught its sides. From that time I never heard the voices. They ceased" (von Fettweis & Warneck, 1998, p.401). In later years she claimed that "her body was raised off the bed, to the height of perhaps a foot [30 cm]. Then she was returned gently to the bed. Three times the phenomenon occurred" (in Braden, 1959, p.364). As an adult, Mrs Eddy was seen levitating by one of her secretaries, Calvin Frye, who

states that on one occasion, when he went into Mrs Eddy's room suddenly, she was suspended in the air up near the ceiling. He was naturally astonished. She reassured him, bidding him not to be afraid, that she was quite all right. Then she quietly settled into her chair and all was normal. (in Braden, 1959, p.364)

**Radiance.** Fodor (1933/1966, p.207) claims that "It is a well-known fact that religious enthusiasm and ecstasy in general is often accompanied by luminous phenomena" and Eliade (1951/1989) writes that "the 'inner light' that suddenly bursts forth after long efforts of concentration and meditation is well known in all religious traditions" (p.420). Hollenback states that

One of the most common phenomena associated with mystical states of consciousness is a preternatural illumination that can take several different forms. Sometimes it becomes manifest as a brilliant aura that seems to emanate from either the mystic or the particular beings that the mystic encounters in the spiritual world. At other times it seems as though it is the whole environment that is suffused with radiance rather than the individual beings within it. (Hollenback, 1996, p.56)

Radiance or beams of light have been reported in conjunction with the levitation of several mystics. "St Ignatius Loyola was seen surrounded by a brilliant light while he prayed, and his body shone with light when he was levitated and St Columba was said to have been continually enveloped in a dazzling golden light" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.207). In 1745, while St Alphonsus Liguori was delivering a sermon at the cathedral in Foggia, a much venerated image of the Virgin "seemed to become luminous and throw a beam on the preacher's face" (Leroy, 1928, p.112). Liguori fell into ecstasy and "lifted in the air several palms above the platform, as if he was about to fly away" (p.112). Witnesses testified to a similar occurrence at Amalfi in 1756. As Alphonsus was preaching, an image of Mary near the pulpit appeared to light up and illuminate his face. The enraptured Alphonsus levitated for about five or six minutes (Leroy, 1928, p.113). In 1608, while visiting the Italian mystic St Bernadino Realino in his monastery, Tobias da Ponte saw so much light streaming out from his room that he thought there was a fire, but when he looked in he saw the saint radiating light while kneeling in prayer about 75 centimetres above the ground (Rogo, 1991, p.21). In a similar incident, a fellow priest saw the Spanish professor of divinity and priest Francis Suarez (1548-1617) kneeling in prayer about 90 centimetres off the ground before a crucifix from which a dazzling light appeared to be radiating onto his face and chest (Thurston, 1952, p.27).

Both levitation and radiance seem to occur during religious rapture. Thurston (1952) reports that several witnesses described "the brilliant and supernatural light which had many times been seen to radiate from Father Bernadino's countenance while in prayer, though on these occasions he had not been raised from the ground" (p.24). Although most of these reports describe radiance emanating from the body of the mystic, there is sometimes confusion as to whether the light radiates from religious objects towards the mystic or vice versa. This is similar to the poltergeist activity controversy where it is suggested that a person's unconscious PK energy causes psi events to be directed at them, thus making them seem to be the target rather than the cause of these events. Similarly, the non-local psi power that mystics access during rapture may not only cause their bodies to radiate, but could also make objects shine light at them.

**Fire Invulnerability.** Several mystics are reported to have survived burning, but not always to their advantage. The Franciscan, Andrew of Spoleto, who went to Fez "to evangelise the Saracens" (Leroy, 1928, p.61), agreed to stand on a burning stake.

"Not only was he spared by the flames, but he was seen levitated in the midst of them, rapt in ecstasy. The Moors stoned him as a sorcerer" (p.61). In another incident, Colonel Jean Cavalier, the troop leader at the scene, confirmed that

Claris, the Camisard leader during the rise of the Huguenots against Louis XIV of France, placed himself on top of a pyre in the presence of six hundred men, and in a state of religious fervour. He continued to speak as the flames rose above his head and did not stop until the wood was consumed. Not only was he unhurt, but there was no mark of fire on his clothes. (Gaddis, 1968, p.102)

Joseph of Cupertino once appeared to bestow something similar to fire invulnerability on the Vicar-General of Nardo who, because of the hot weather, had been reluctant to bless three crosses that Joseph had erected near Grotella. The three and a half hour ceremony went ahead after Joseph said "My Mother will not let you feel the heat" and, although "the Vicar-General wore a cope, he did not feel the least discomfort from the broiling sun" (Pastrovicchi (1918/1980, p.55). In Naples, Joseph once levitated while in church and, flying in a vertical position with his hands outstretched, landed on the altar "in the middle of the flowers and candles which were burning in profusion" (Dingwall, 1947/1962, p.12). The nuns who were watching him called out that he would catch fire, but Joseph levitated back without suffering any harm. In an example of how ASCs confer psi abilities, the tenth-century Sufi, Abū'l-Adyān, once demonstrated that he could walk through fire without being injured, but developed a small blister on his foot.

The Sufi later told his servant that he had received this blister at the instant that he was emerging from the fire when he prematurely came out of the trance-state that he had been in while crossing the hot coals. (Hollenback, 1996, p.193)

Vincent Gaddis (1968) describes a fire performer who does not fit neatly into any of the seven groups but whose evidence seems relevant to this research. The performer's feats "included drinking boiling water, chewing glowing charcoal, handling and licking red-hot iron bars, and introducing a welding torch into his mouth repeatedly" (p.109). The climax of his act was holding and bending a heated iron bar between his teeth for about ten seconds. A dentist who examined his teeth and gums was unable to explain how they were not damaged. The performer explained that as an orphan in India he had been adopted by native fire-walkers who, although they could transfer their fire immunity to him, insisted that he must learn to gain the power himself.

For several hours each day he sat in front of a small oil lamp, trying to sense the god behind the flame. ... Finally he became aware of a conscious something — invisible and intangible — connected with the flame, and in due time he received the gift of immunity. (Gaddis, 1968, p.110)

Without disputing whether fire or weather gods exist, this example suggests that personifying whatever causes fire immunity or weather control makes it easier to attain these powers, especially if they have transcendent qualities, rather than originating entirely within the physical body. The fact that the boy had to concentrate or meditate on the flame for so long before sensing “a conscious something” appears to confirm that ASCs and psi powers are connected; that the “god behind the flame” may be a personification of a non-local energy; and that children may learn these abilities more easily than adults.

**Interaction with animals.** Some mystics, such as St Francis of Assisi, are reported to have had a remarkable affinity with animals. If spirit mediums and shamans can communicate with spirits of the dead, it is not unlikely that mystics with psi abilities can communicate with animals. Joseph of Cupertino frequently displayed this ability (Pastrovicci, 1918/1980), as well being able to read people's minds, especially during confessions (Dingwall, 1947/1962, p.23). Joseph seemed to like birds; he once set free a gold-finch which returned when he called. A hawk, that had killed a finch that Joseph had taught to speak a few words, approached at his command and sat still while he reproached it. A ram that went mad after being bitten by dogs was healed when Joseph stroked it. He told two hares at Grottella not to go too far away for fear of hunters. When one was chased, it ran into the monastery and leaped into his arms. When pursued by hunting dogs, the other hid under Joseph's habit. When the hunters asked Joseph if he had seen the hare, he produced it and told it to enter some nearby bushes for safety. To their amazement, the hare did what it was told and the dogs did not chase it (Pastrovicci, 1918/1980, pp.66-69).

The Franciscan St Peter of Alcantara often levitated to a great height outdoors where he would remain in contemplation, on one occasion for three hours (Leroy, 1928, p.63). Sometimes his body would be luminous, and in one report “with his arms crossed on his chest he continued to soar while hundreds of little birds gathered around him, making a most agreeable concert with their songs” (Melton, 2001, p.909). Adam Dickey, one of Mary Baker Eddy's secretaries, tells how as a

child Eddy "learned that she could mentally address her pet dog and, without speaking aloud, get him to obey her directions. She had only to think, 'Ben, go under the table and lie down', to get the dog to do so" (in Braden, 1959, p.367).

**Weather control.** Joseph of Cupertino seemed to control the weather on several occasions. He once prayed that the area of Cupertino "be spared in a severe storm, and the hurricane ceased at once" (Pastrovicchi, (1918/1980, p.41), and on another occasion, after praying during a frightening downpour, he ran out of the church shouting, whereupon the clouds dissipated (p.41). When he was "transferred to another Capuchin house in Fossombrone; ... in the course of the journey it was observed that during a heavy shower Joseph's clothes remained dry" (Dingwall, 1947/1962, p.24). Mary Baker Eddy liked rain but not thunderstorms. In one of her notebooks she describes instantly changing some threatening clouds into gentle rain and a rainbow (Braden, 1959, p.365). After assigning her staff to keep an eye on the weather, her secretary Adam Dickey, observed that "there were fewer and fewer thunderstorms until they almost ceased altogether" (in Braden, 1959, p.365).

**Healing.** Joseph of Cupertino also seemed to have healing powers. "His charity towards the sick was ... so pleasing to God that He glorified the saint by miraculous cures" (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.50). By acting as if they were merely the conduit for divine powers, mystics such as Joseph were able to heal people without jeopardising the Church's prohibition against vanity or egotism. For example, Joseph "once cured a blind woman by touching her eyes and saying 'May the Mother of God restore you to health'" (Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.55). On another occasion Joseph combined healing and levitation in what could be seen as a "seventeenth-century form of modern shock therapy" (Dingwall, 1947/1962, p.18). When a disturbed nobleman was brought before him, Joseph touched his head, prayed, and then, uttering his usual cry of rapture, levitated into the air carrying the chevalier with him by the hair for about a quarter of an hour. When they returned to the ground, to the amazement of those present, the man was completely healed (Dingwall, 1947/1962, p.18; Pastrovicchi, 1918/1980, p.37).

From childhood Mary Baker Eddy seemed to have extraordinary healing abilities. After her elder brother severely cut his leg, the wound would not heal until her father carried Mary into his room to touch his leg (Braden, 1959, p.367). As an

adult Eddy would heal people whenever she felt like it. She once healed a man in the street by touching his shoulder (p.366). She healed an engineer "whose eye had been put out by a hot cinder" (p.366), but the restored eye was smaller than the other, so Eddy treated him again, "and the eye became perfect as to size" (p.366). Once, in a furniture shop she was distracted by a clerk with a bandage over his eye. When he later removed the bandage, the clerk was baffled to find that the abscess on his eye had completely disappeared (Braden, 1959, p.366).

## 5.8 Genetics

It has been suggested that there is a genetic component to psi abilities. The literature seldom mentions whether the families of people described in this research also possessed psi talents, although, even if a majority of them did, it might be hard to differentiate clearly between genetic and cultural influences. Nevertheless, some evidence points to a genetic component, because some people manifest psi abilities when too young to have done much meditative or spiritual training. A brief review of the seven groups illustrates that this issue is still unclear. Eliade (1951/1989, p.13) points out that in parts of Asia "'self-made' shamans are considered less powerful than those who inherited the profession or who obeyed the 'call' of the gods and spirits". Similarly, in Western and Central Siberia shamanism is hereditary; "the future shaman exhibits exceptional traits from adolescence" (p.15). Vitebsky (1995) notes that although "most traditions emphasize that it is the spirits themselves who choose who is to become a shaman" (p.56), a shaman's "special powers may be inherent in a person from birth, in which case they must be brought to light; or else the person may have a predisposition or potential for shamanism and must somehow acquire the power" (p.54).

There exist several examples of possessed children (eg: Cristiani, 1974), but I have not found any cases where parent and child were possessed. What might occur in child possession is that confused or malicious spirits invade the consciousness of unusually open children before they have learnt to prevent it. In the Enfield poltergeist case it was thought that Janet was a latent spirit medium who had not yet learnt to control her psi abilities, but neither hers nor Manning's parents seemed to have similar abilities. If psi abilities do have a genetic component, like recessive genes, they may only appear occasionally. Home's family background suggests that his abilities may have been inherited. Home (1863/1972, p.3) writes

that "My mother was a seer throughout her life. ... She had what is known in Scotland as the second sight, and in many instances she saw things which were afterwards found to have occurred at a distance, just as she had described them". Burton (1948) concludes that "Daniel's mediumship was thus to some extent congenital and hereditary" (p.43). When Home was a baby his "cradle was frequently rocked, as if some kind guardian spirit was tending me in my slumbers" (Home, 1863/1972, p.1), and he had his first premonition when he was four.

Many alien abductees report psi abilities when they were children but are unsure whether this was before or after their first close encounter experiences. Abduction narratives contain numerous descriptions of reproductive scenarios, aliens supposedly tampering with human genetics, and alien-human hybrid children (Mack, 1995, p.38), although it is unclear whether these incidents are related to psi abilities. In the 1957 Villas Boas case, he describes being obliged to have intercourse twice with an attractive human-like female alien (Story, 2001, p.633). Boas believes that he was being used as breeding stock, although he does not claim to have had psi abilities. In certain families, members of several generations describe abduction experiences (Wilson, 1998, pp.186 & 309), and some researchers (Carroll & Tober, 1999; Rodwell, 2000) believe that, as a result of alien genetic manipulation, there are numerous, what they term, 'Indigo' or 'Star' children being born with heightened spiritual, intellectual and psi abilities. There is some confusion about their function, but one suggestion is that they are here to help the human race become more spiritual and environmentally sensitive. For example, Mack (1995, p.333) suggests that "alien-human interaction is for the purpose of evolution, both biological and spiritual. A new breed or 'tribe', a hybrid form, is being created between the alien race or races and human beings".

In the martial arts there is little evidence that psi abilities are inherited because in several traditions masters pass on their secretive techniques to their most talented pupils rather than their children. Master Chang belongs to a long lineage of masters, but the position was not passed down from father to son. One reason for this may be because advanced practitioners either become celibate, or severely curtail their sexual activities, in order to preserve and redirect their sexual energy.

Mystics with powerful psi abilities are not noted for having equally talented children because their religions often require them to be celibate. Joseph of Cupertino first



lapsed into trances when he was at school which suggests an innate ability, but although several members of his extended family belonged to the Catholic Church, they are not reported to have had any of his psi abilities.

During my interviews with Spiritualists they were asked if they believed that psi abilities were inherited. Although some admitted that several members of their families had these talents, most were unsure whether they were inherited, but were certain that family or cultural influences did make a difference. For example, although Maude claims that her parents, brothers, children and some of her grandchildren have psi abilities, she, Marianne, Richard and Edward think that everyone potentially has them but one needs to be raised in an encouraging environment for them to blossom. Similarly, Elizabeth, whose grandmother, mother and both daughters have psi abilities, suggests that "perhaps our minds are left open because of being brought up not to be afraid of things we can't see".

There is no clear evidence that all psi abilities are inherited, although many people are born into families where several generations have them. Murphy (1992) speculates that evolution will lead to psi abilities becoming more prevalent. Apart from possible alien or genetic intervention, is not clear how this might happen in the light of the numerous taboos against psi abilities and research. Despite the antagonism of many scientists, Sheldrake (1981) has suggested that inherited traits are not entirely the result of biological genetics but may be influenced by information fields that somehow transcend the physical body. If there is any truth to these claims, then these 'morphogenic fields' may also be related to psi abilities.

## **5.9 Summary**

This chapter has revealed that there are people with similar psi abilities in all the groups, and that some accomplished levitators, such as Home and Joseph of Cupertino, possessed a remarkable range of PK abilities. This demonstrates that levitation is only one among many unexplained psi events that occur worldwide in a variety of religious and physical environments. These psi abilities may be unrelated, but they sometimes occur simultaneously (eg: teleportation and levitation), and most group members assume that they are all facilitated by spiritual entities or powers. If they are manifestations of the same underlying force, learning how any other psi ability works may help explain levitation. There may be a genetic component and there seems to be a complex intelligence behind many of these psi

abilities. In poltergeist activity and spirit possession the motivation can be puerile or malicious which supports the suggested link to the unconscious mind of conflicted or immature individuals. Additional evidence for this background intelligence is that some levitators fly a meaningful trajectory and normally land safely; unlike modern surgery or medicines, psi healing cures illnesses, but seems to leave the rest of the body unscathed; people undergoing physical elongation revert to their normal size without damaged organs or bones; and people can bilocate or be teleported without suffering psychological or physical damage. As the report of the orphan who accessed the god behind the flame illustrates (Gaddis, 1968, p.110), psi abilities are not only linked to consciousness, but appear to have functional access to all levels of matter, which appears to support the traditional yogic or mystical assertion that some aspect of consciousness underlies physical reality. In addition, the fact that some mystics can learn to survive without eating and drinking suggests that psi energy and chi may be synonymous; a non-local form of energy that already permeates the body whether one has learnt to control it or not.

## Chapter 6                      Taboos and Obstacles

The theme of this chapter is that the seven groups that have traditionally produced levitation reports have a variety of internal and/or external restrictions, obstacles or sanctions that impede the personal development, public demonstration, or empirical investigation of psi phenomena. For convenience, I will use the term 'taboo' when discussing these restrictions, although this is an extension of the word's normal anthropological meaning. The word taboo "derives from the Polynesian *tabu* or *tapu* meaning 'sacred'" and "refers to an exceptionally powerful prohibition norm whose violation by individuals usually attracts strong sanctions from the community" (Hunter and Whitten, 1976, p.379). Winick (1970) claims that "in the early study of religion, the term taboo was used to indicate the signs of caution established to guard against basically dangerous things" (p.523).

Were it not for the existence of these obstacles and taboos over the centuries, human levitation would today probably have a very different cultural, religious and scientific status. As a result of these taboos and obstacles, in modern Western society there are very few public demonstrations of levitation, and few people are sufficiently convinced of the reality of such PK events to consider researching them. For example, there are currently no parapsychologists or psi research units in any of the five universities in Western Australia, and I have not found a researcher anywhere in the world who is studying human levitation. As George Hansen (2001) notes, the entertainment industry has made millions out of popular films about the paranormal and aliens, such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *ET* (1982) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999), yet the amount of money that has been spent on scientific research into these subjects is negligible.

Some of the taboos to be discussed are not limited to any particular group but, especially in Western society, reflect wider social, religious, or scientific attitudes about psi or miraculous events. Some of the taboos have varied over time; a few of the older ones are now less powerful, while others have arisen more recently. Even if these taboos weakened, and the seven groups started vigorously claiming that a few of their members had levitated, they may still not be believed by the wider community. Radin says that one reason for this is the four-stage process that new or radical ideas have to go through to be accepted by science.

In Stage 1, skeptics confidently proclaim that the idea is impossible because it violates the Laws of Science. This stage can last for years or centuries, depending on how much the idea challenges conventional wisdom. In Stage 2, skeptics reluctantly concede that the idea is possible but that it is not very interesting and the claimed effects are extremely weak. Stage 3 begins when the mainstream realises not only that the idea is important but that its effects are much stronger and more pervasive than previously imagined. Stage 4 is achieved when the same critics who previously disavowed any interest in the idea begin to proclaim that they thought of it first. Eventually, no one remembers that the idea was once considered a dangerous heresy. (Radin, 1997, p.1)

Not all new ideas receive this treatment, but it would appear that with regard to human levitation some researchers are still at the equivalent of Stage 1. For example, Dr Robert Carroll's *The Skeptics Dictionary* (2003) states that "Some take the ability to levitate as [a] sign of blessedness. Others see levitation as a conjuror's trick. No one really levitates; they just appear to do so." Dr Carroll has chaired the philosophy department of an American college for several years and teaches classes such as 'Logic and Critical Reasoning' and 'Critical Thinking About the Paranormal and the Occult'. Asserting, without providing any supporting evidence, that no one levitates illustrates the inadequate reasoning that many sceptics use to justify their antagonism towards the paranormal.

Hansen (2001) claims that in the USA the "Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal [CSICOP] ... is the most aggressive antagonist of the paranormal today" (p.148). Likewise, Eysenck & Sargent (1993) explain that CSICOP has "had a baneful effect on parapsychology and retarded its development" (p.178), and Radin (1997, p.217) notes "its impassioned commitment against parapsychology". Hansen (2001) points out that the group's magazine *The Skeptical Inquirer* has a circulation of over fifty thousand, while the circulation of the *Journal of Parapsychology* is less than eight hundred (p.148). CSICOP "has spawned more than 65 local and international groups with similar aims" (p.148). Hansen (2001) quotes Lee Nisbet, a previous Executive Director of CSICOP, as saying that belief in the paranormal is "a very dangerous phenomenon, dangerous to science, dangerous to the basic fabric of our society. ... We feel it is the duty of the scientific community to show that these beliefs are utterly screwball" (p.149). Hansen notes that the committee includes many well-qualified members, is dominated by males, is largely against religious sentiments and includes numerous magicians (p.149). He explains that

wariness towards the supernatural is nothing new for humankind; it goes back millennia. There have always been taboos, prohibitions, and restrictions surrounding the supernatural. There are undoubtedly good reasons for this. Religious orthodoxy decrees dabbling in the paranormal to be a sin; CSICOP ridicules such dabbling. The effect is the same. Both religious orthodoxy and atheists enforce a taboo; both shun paranormal phenomena, and this commonality is key to understanding them. (Hansen, 2001, p.161)

The scrutiny of groups such as CSICOP does have some benefits, as Cambridge physicist Professor Brian Josephson explains: "If anything the (parapsychology) research is of a higher standard because people are aware of the importance of not doing research in a way that the sceptics can criticise" (in Macgregor, 2002, p.11).

Scepticism is not limited to America. Jayashree Lengade (2002) reports that in India the Bombay (Mumbai) police and a group called the All India Committee to Eradicate Superstition and Blind Faith are "cracking down on charlatans" by attempting "to convince people [that] special power is more often than not sleight of hand or illusion" (p.9). The group attempts to expose tricksters, who extract money from the public by pretending to be 'godmen' with psi powers, by using stage magicians to demonstrate how magical tricks are performed. In one demonstration, a man is clad in saffron robes and wearing a false beard and seems to sit suspended in mid-air without any support but for a hand resting on a pole. But a superstition-busting activist tells the hushed crowd of more than 100 people that the long garment actually hides a wooden seat fixed to the pole. (Lengade, 2002, p.9)

It is appropriate to expose fraudulent behaviour, but this group's activities seem to imply that psi phenomena such as levitation do not exist at all. Campaign magician Anand Tayade claims that "There's no such thing as performing miracles on this earth" (in Lengade, 2002, p.9). Given that no conclusive scientific evidence has proven that miracles or psi phenomena do not exist, this group's assertions appear to be somewhat misleading.

Another, perhaps unexpected, source of scepticism about miraculous events is some members of the Christian Church itself. The Anglican Dean of Perth, Dr John Shepherd (2003, p.4), asserts that biblical miracles are merely "stories which symbolise Christ's affinity with the Father," so need not be regarded as actual occurrences. "Hardly surprisingly, symbols need to be interpreted symbolically, not literally" (p.4). Similarly, Barbara Thiering (1992) claims that "In the gospels there are a great many miracles, which the modern mind finds incredible" (p.22). She

asserts that biblical miracles are “part of the surface story, but also conceal something else, actual historical events” (p.23). Thiering uses the peshet technique to discover what lies behind miracle stories. For example, she concludes that reports of Jesus walking on the water are actually a cryptic way of saying that he was walking along a pier that enabled priests to board boats without getting their robes wet (p.92). While this suggestion may be true, it leaves unanswered the question of whether we should interpret reports of miracles from other religions in a similar fashion, or whether some of them are descriptions of genuine psi events.

Sceptical newspaper articles have a wider public influence than those in professional journals. In 2003 the Australian Federal Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, wanted “to cut funding for ‘frivolous courses’ like golf course management, aromatherapy, surfboard riding and the paranormal, to ensure that universities serve Australia’s long-term interests” (Ruse, 2003). Nelson claimed that it was possible to do a degree in the paranormal (in Bridgstock, 2003). In an ironic twist, one person who responded vehemently was Dr Martin Bridgstock, a life member of the Australian Skeptics, who pointed out that his ‘Skepticism, Science and the Paranormal’ class is just an option in a BSc degree at Griffith University (Bridgstock, 2003). That this course is being taught by someone who is sceptical about psi illustrates science’s attitude towards this subject. Although Bridgstock claims that he is not trying to turn his students into sceptics, it would be interesting to see how the Australian Skeptics would react if a firm believer in psi started teaching a course on the paranormal.

As a possible explanation for the public scepticism of some scientists, it has been suggested that secret psi research by the superpowers commenced during the Cold War and remains classified (Gerber, 2001; White, 1988). This is currently almost impossible to prove and, if true, would only involve a minority of scientists, but their contrived public scepticism about psi might influence many other researchers. Hasted (1981) reports that in “1977 a young Russian physicist, Auguste Stern, defected to the West and related some of his experiences in parapsychology” (p.201). Stern claimed he had worked in the Siberian science city of Novosibirsk at an institute that had about fifty scientists in its parapsychology department. Hasted writes that the Soviets used the term ‘partial death’ to describe levitation, “a term which indicates a rather different conceptual approach” (p.201). Although Hasted does not explain what he means by this, the term may refer to experimental

subjects entering a deep meditative or trance state to induce levitation. Stern, who said he had successfully levitated during the institute's experiments, explained that

the technique used in the Soviet Union to induce human levitation is to enclose the prone subject within a cube of mirrors. The multiple images, apparently stretching in all directions to infinity, have the effect of disorienting the subject, who then levitates if he has the ability. (in Hasted, 1981, p.201)

Neither Hasted nor Stern explains what constitutes the ability to levitate, and why disorientation would trigger it. In 1977 a film producer created a similar mirror device and Hasted put equipment inside to record whether the occupant (Stern) became lighter, but nothing significant happened because, according to Stern, the device felt too unlike the original. It is puzzling that Hasted, who is now dead, does not mention testing any other subjects. It seems unlikely that a scientist would go to the trouble of setting up this experiment and then give up after testing only one subject. This may indicate that to some extent government secrecy and disinformation have replaced or are augmenting the historical taboos against psi.

Some levitators do not fall neatly into any of the seven groups, but that does not make their claims any easier to investigate. Willie G, a child who claimed to be able to bend pieces of metal, told Hasted (1981, p.200) that he could also levitate, but only when alone in his bedroom. To test the boy's claims, Hasted asked him to "write and put his inked fingerprints" on his bedroom ceiling, which he did successfully. Willie "was also able to carry a Polaroid camera up with him, to photograph himself in proximity to the ceiling," but Hasted admits that these results "do not represent good validation" (p.200). We can only speculate why Willie cannot levitate in front of witnesses, but it reveals some of the difficulties faced by parapsychologists. It also raises the question as to how many other children there are who can levitate but who are not being scientifically investigated.

### **6.1 Shamanism**

There do not appear to be indigenous taboos against levitation; rather it is that the anthropological literature on shamanism generally fails to take psi events seriously. Some ethnographers have reported cases of levitation, but they do not seem to have led other researchers to pursue the matter. Kalweit (1992) explains that,

From time immemorial fantastic abilities have been attributed to shamans, and they themselves have not hesitated to boast of the most venturesome spiritual experiences. All tribal traditions recount bizarre tales of mysterious powers. Academia has taken pleasure in this

colourful collection of the unreal, so long as it could view its components as fairy tales, myths, or productions of the primitive mind. But the moment researchers claimed to seriously investigate these powers, they brought down the wrath of the academic community on themselves. (Kalweit, 1992, p.113)

For example, Kalweit (1992) points out that the "ethnologist Robert Lowie ... characterized North American Pawnee medicine men as 'masters of sleight-of-hand' and their abilities as tricks. But in the ethnological literature there are scarcely any serious suggestions — let alone investigations — of how these 'tricks' are executed" (p.114). The anthropologist Dr Jeremy Narby (1998) provides a brief history of his profession's attitude towards shamans. The first descriptions of Siberian *samans* — supposedly the origin of the word shaman — classified them as "mentally ill" (p.15). Even though anthropologists then realised that shamans existed in numerous countries, "They were unanimously considered neurotic, psychotic, hysterical, or schizophrenic" (Narby, 1998, p.15). In the middle of the twentieth century, most anthropologists changed their attitudes towards shamans and began to regard them as the equivalent of psychologists, philosophers, physicians, pharmacologists or priests. But these classifications did not recognize shamans' psi abilities because mainstream Western science was reluctant to acknowledge the reality of psi phenomena. Even today anthropologists debate the validity of many shamanistic beliefs. In Narby's (1998) opinion, "the reality hiding behind the concept of 'shamanism' reflects the anthropologist's gaze, independently of its angle" (p.16), which suggests that most of his colleagues will only acknowledge shamans' psi abilities when parapsychology is better received by modern science.

There are a few anthropologists, such as Edith Turner (1997), who are prepared to risk the ridicule of their colleagues by claiming that, like shamans, they believe in the reality of spirits, and shamanic healing. Turner recalls that it was during field work in the 1950s that she first encountered indigenous beliefs in spirits, but her training required her to refrain from 'going native'. The fact that it has taken her almost fifty years to publish her assertion that "studying such a mentality from inside is a legitimate and valuable kind of anthropology" (para.26) reveals the scepticism of many of her colleagues.

Documenting shamans' psi abilities in the field is difficult, and getting a shaman into a laboratory might be even harder. Anthropologists do not receive parapsychology training, and there may be indigenous taboos against revealing



certain rituals or spiritual phenomena to outsiders. Despite shamans reportedly possessing a large range of psi abilities, they are poorly documented in many anthropological texts. By not researching these abilities in more detail over the last century, anthropologists and parapsychologists have missed a valuable opportunity because, as Western influences spread into indigenous communities, shamanic psi events may gradually become scarcer.

## **6.2 Spirit Possession**

Several taboos and obstacles which hamper the impartial investigation of psi events that often occur during spirit possession in Western societies are to be found both within and outside the Christian Church. For example, after being exorcised, demoniacs suffer from amnesia (Cramer, 1979, p.23) so they are unable to testify as to whether they levitated or not. Many religions seem reluctant to document the psi aspects of possession cases, perhaps for reasons of privacy and the belief that the demoniacs had been indulging in demonic or sinful activities. Another reason is that in a modern, secular society many people might believe that claims of psi events occurring during possession were hoaxes, delusions, or misguided attempts to prove the existence of demonic entities. For ethical reasons and because the causes of spirit possession are still unclear, the phenomenon would be almost impossible to simulate in a laboratory. As Nicola (1974) writes, "because of the condemnation of superstitious practices by the Church, we are forbidden ... to attempt to induce diabolical manifestations for study" (p.24).

Outside the Christian Church, many modern psychologists and psychiatrists regard spirit possession as a form of mental illness and therefore deny the reality of concurrent psi events. Whether or not a psi researcher agrees that possession involves mental illness, ethical restrictions normally prevent interviews with current or recovered demoniacs because of the possibility of emotional trauma and doubts about their ability to provide informed consent. On the other hand, Cramer (1979) acknowledges that possession involves psi events, but insists that levitation is not one of them. As well as contradicting the available evidence, this assertion unnecessarily confuses the psi dimension of these cases.

The Church, too, sometimes appears to be confused about these matters. Michael Cuneo (2002) reports that in 1970 Father John Nicola and three witnesses observed Candido Amantini, the then official exorcist of Rome, interviewing a

bedridden Spanish nun who was thought to be possessed. The nun "appeared to rise six feet [1.83 m] in the air and remain suspended for thirty seconds or longer" (p.316). Cuneo quotes Nicola as saying that

Everyone in the room saw her body levitate. ... At least this was our experience. We saw it, but I'm *not* saying the body levitated. Quite frankly, I don't believe it actually did levitate. We may have been involved in a situation of mutual hypnosis. Or, from my researches in parapsychology, I'd propose it might have been psychokinesis. The point is, you can't jump to conclusions. You can't assume that the demonic is present. You have to rule out these other possibilities. (in Cuneo, 2002, p.316)

It is unlikely that all five witnesses were hypnotised into seeing the nun levitate, and the claim that a person who is lifted into the air by PK is not levitating is puzzling. Although Nicola, who worked on several occasions with the parapsychologist Dr Joseph Rhine, may be correct in saying that one cannot assume that a person who mysteriously rises into the air is possessed, it would help if he clearly stated his definition of levitation. During the 1970s and 1980s Nicola was "the person most often turned to by American Catholic bishops seeking advice on suspected cases of demonization" (Cuneo, 2002, p.316), and was technical adviser for the film *The Exorcist* (1973), which includes a memorable scene of a young girl levitating, that was apparently inspired by the case of the Spanish nun. Nicola (1974) writes that there may be several reasons for what happens during cases of possible diabolical possession. These are: "1) fraud and deception, 2) natural scientific causes, 3) parapsychological causes, 4) diabolical influences, 5) miracles" (p.29). Nicola's suggestion that, excluding fraud and deception, human levitation has four possible causes is a mixture of religious speculation and science. The mechanism for natural, parapsychological, diabolical and miraculous psi events may actually be the same. The only difference between natural scientific and parapsychological causes is that one is currently understood by science and the other is not. If and when the causes of human levitation are understood, the 'para' prefix may be removed from the terms that are currently used to describe the phenomenon. By mixing religious beliefs with some scientific observations, Nicola's analysis of psi events is more of a hindrance than a help in understanding how levitation works.

In another example of religious speculation, Cuneo (2002) complains that, although he attended about a dozen Catholic exorcisms over a two year period, he never saw anyone levitate, but other reliable witnesses reported that they had seen "a middle-aged man rising four feet [1.22 m] in the air during the preliminary stages of an

exorcism ... [and] a hugely obese woman ... levitating in her chair, despite the efforts of three people to hold her down" (p.317). When Cuneo asked these witnesses why he always seemed to miss these dramatic events, it was suggested to him that, apart from luck of the draw, "it was because Satan, knowing I was a writer and not wanting to blow his cover, was deliberately keeping me in the dark about his very real powers to possess people" (p.318). This supposition may represent another reason why levitation during spirit possession seems so hard to document.

### **6.3 Poltergeist Activity**

As mentioned previously, poltergeist activity is a psi phenomenon rather than the name of a group, so there are no group cultural taboos that prevent its investigation, but the phenomenon is sometimes demonised because its symptoms occasionally overlap with spirit possession. There are several inherent obstacles for poltergeist researchers in addition to public and scientific scepticism about psi matters. The first is that poltergeist cases are so rare, and, as Hasted notes, a typical case "will last only for a period of weeks or months" (1981, p.165), which means that a researcher's window of opportunity is often brief. In addition, when poltergeist events first start, the person or family concerned generally has little understanding of what is happening and will typically blame unusual noises on pranksters, rats, water pipes, or weather conditions. When these possibilities have been eliminated, most people have no idea who to turn to and so may contact the police, a priest, or even a journalist. If a helpful parapsychologist is found, the poltergeist case may have almost run its course and/or the location, to use forensic terminology, may have been thoroughly contaminated. The witnesses may have received so many contradictory or unhelpful suggestions that they are too stressed or confused to accept constructive advice. To make matters worse, because there still exists a debate as to what causes poltergeist activity – spirits or unconscious psi or both – there is no guaranteed method of solving the problem.

Playfair (1980) provides an excellent account of the difficulties faced while investigating the Enfield poltergeist. For about fourteen months, to witness as many incidents as possible and provide support for the family, Playfair and Maurice Grosse took turns spending as much time as possible with the family in their small, cramped house. Such a commitment is not easy, especially when the family is constantly disturbed by unpredictable and sometimes frightening psi events such as

objects or people flying across the room. Documenting these events is difficult. As Roll explains, a poltergeist investigator

cannot impose all the precautions and controls that are possible in experimental work, and he often has to labour under a great deal of uncertainty. Poltergeist studies are not for the person who craves a neat and well-controlled research design. (Roll, 1976, p.9)

Another problem is that the intelligence behind poltergeist events is seldom cooperative. The Enfield researchers could ask questions out loud and 'the Voice' would answer, seemingly from the mouth of Janet, the epicentre of the case. When asked to produce psi phenomena, the Voice would insist that they first turn around or leave the room. Fodor suggests that this may be because "the gaze of the human eye has a checking effect" (1933/1966, p.291). Although there would be no witnesses, they once asked Janet to bounce up and down on the bed in the hope that she would then be levitated. While everyone else was outside the room, Janet claimed that she had "been floating in the air" (Playfair, 1980, p.151). She was given a red biro and asked to draw a line around the ceiling light — which could not be reached without moving the bed — while the experiment was repeated. When they finally got back into the room, "there was a thin red line round the light fitting on the ceiling" (p.152). Sceptics would claim that Janet had cheated, and the researchers could not prove otherwise.

To confuse matters further, there are psychological reasons why the person at the centre of poltergeist activity may start to cheat. If a poltergeist case is the result of someone unconsciously relieving internal stress by projecting PK energy, then the sympathy and attention of investigators may gradually assist that person to become conscious of their stress. At times during this self-awareness process he or she may lapse into a slight trance and feel compelled to throw objects without knowing why. As Fodor points out,

When the supernormal conditions no longer exist, the agent may continue to relieve his stress in a normal manner and be caught doing so. He then confesses; the case is branded as fraudulent; and the investigators return home easily overlooking the fact that the earlier phenomena could not have been performed normally. (in Gaddis, 1968, p.173)

These changing psychological dynamics are generally ignored by sceptics and the media, so, at the slightest hint of hoaxing, the psi aspect of poltergeist activity is dismissed or ridiculed, thus making the job of poltergeist researchers even harder.

#### 6.4 Spiritualism

There are several reasons why psi phenomena that occur during séances are difficult to research. The first is that most mediums only have mental (ESP) psi abilities, and even those with physical (PK) abilities cannot be certain whether anything will occur during a particular séance. Secondly, most séances are held in complete darkness which limits the observability of whatever psi events might occur and, as Lamar Keene (1977) explains, increases the opportunity for fraud. Dishonest mediums can trick sitters into thinking that they are levitating above them in the dark by gently passing a pair of shoes over their heads (Pearsall, 1972, p.65). Today researchers can use night-vision goggles to observe what is happening, but this equipment was not available during the early days of Spiritualism when the public's ambivalence about the phenomenon started. Scepticism about Spiritualism and spirit mediums is well documented, and scientists such as Sir William Crookes (1874/1972, p.45), who chose to research these subjects, were publicly criticised.

Time and again Crookes invited eminent scientists to test Home, without restrictions, yet they failed or refused to take the opportunity to do so. We must bear this in mind when considering the merit of skeptical assertions about Home. Many contemporary skeptical men of science clearly possessed all the cowardice of their convictions. (Eysenck & Sargent, 1993, p.28)

Although Home was never caught cheating, he was frequently criticised by sceptics. For example, Robert Browning and his wife Elizabeth were impressed when they witnessed a levitating table at one of Home's séances, but later the poet changed his mind and "eventually wrote a long poem entitled 'Mr Sludge the Medium', which was a thinly disguised attack on Home" (Chambers, 1998, p.82).

Another taboo that has obstructed research into Spiritualism is disapproval by the Christian Church. The Spiritualist National Union (SNU) claims that early Christianity accepted "psychic abilities, inspirational speech, speaking in other languages, physical mediumship, healing and so on" (SNU, 2004b, para.3), but then

the 4th-century Council of Nicaea brought to an end the use of mediums and held that divine guidance, through the Holy Spirit, should be sought only from the priesthood: 'false prophets' were held to be servants of the devil, and sorcerers, heretics and mediums were all targets for persecution as a result of 'witch mania'. This accelerated in the Middle Ages, when religious sanction for this persecution was given in 1484 by a papal bull and by the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* or 'Hammer of the Witches'. During this long period of persecution anyone suspected of using psychic gifts for whatever

purpose was in danger of torture, trial and burning, and hundreds of thousands of psychics were put to death by organised 'witch-hunters'. (SNU, 2004b, para.4)

Most of the Australian states inherited anti-witchcraft legislation from English law and, although the various acts may not have mentioned Spiritualism in particular, as Dr Lynne Hume (1997) explains, they did prohibit activities such as fortune telling, "sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration" (p.221). This can describe a spirit medium's behaviour at a séance or private consultation, especially if a fee is charged, because the authorities regarded that as a form of fraud: "As far as the law is concerned anyone who ... in any way professes to foresee the future, is open to the charge of deceiving because the law regards this as an impossible task" (Hume, 1997, p.221). Most of these Australian acts have been repealed, but some still exist, although this does not mean that the state authorities are currently prosecuting spirit mediums or clairvoyants. According to the Pagan Awareness Network Australia (2004), in New South Wales the Witchcraft Act of 1735 was repealed in 1969 and the offence of fortune telling under the 1902 Vagrancy Act was repealed in 1979. In Queensland the section of the Criminal Code that applied to witchcraft, fortune telling and occult sciences was only repealed in 2000, but the Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act 1931, which makes it illegal to tell fortunes, is still in place. Similar acts still exist in Victoria and South Australia. Fear of prosecution may still therefore inhibit some spirit mediums.

The Spiritualists that I interviewed are well aware of the various taboos and criticisms to which they have been subjected over years. When asked if they approved of someone researching human levitation, most of them said yes. Maude believes that the public's traditional fear of psi phenomena is already lessening and that in future they will be regarded "as a natural thing and we won't think it's weird or peculiar or odd. [It's] just a natural force and natural process". Edward believes that deliberately trying to learn to levitate "would be very silly" but regards the religious perspective that it is the devil that levitates everyone other than saints as "rather one-sided".

During their interviews, the Christian priests and pastors were asked what they thought about Spiritualists attempting to contact spirits of the dead and the popular television program *Crossing Over* that features the medium John Edward. Most were disapproving of John Edward or sceptical of his abilities, although some

admitted that they watched the program for amusement. Philip claims that contacting spirits is "Definitely contrary to our beliefs," and Kevin states that "we've been warned in the scriptures not to". Although Gordon thinks that attempting to prove that life-after-death exists is "a good cause," he believes that Spiritualists are "misdirected" because, for example, the entity that one contacts may be deceptive or demonic. Brian suggests that contacting spirits may be "very, very risky," and both he and Francis believe that whatever causes a medium to levitate may be demonic. Most of these priests appear to have a negative attitude towards psi abilities and have little justification for demonising those with a different spiritual perspective to their own.

### **6.5 Alien Abductions.**

The psi aspects of close encounters are hard to research because, according to the governments of most countries, UFOs do not exist which implies that anyone who believes that they have been abducted by aliens is mistaken or deluded. Ufology is not an official field of academic or government research, which means that there are few scientists investigating the reality of UFOs and abductions, and those that do risk the wrath or ridicule of their peers. After Harvard Medical School psychiatrist Dr John Mack wrote his first book on abductions, amidst rumours of his imminent dismissal, a formal university investigation was convened which concluded that he "should widen his professional circle of research associates and adopt a more detached attitude towards his subjects" (in Lucas, 2001, p.5). The head of the investigation, Emeritus Professor Arnold Relman, stated that Dr Mack is "not taken seriously by his colleagues any more. ... But in the interests of academic freedom, Harvard can afford to have a couple of oddballs" (p.5).

Some researchers study people's opinions about UFOs and abductions rather than the actual reports. The sociologist Dr Erich Goode (2000) claims that believing in UFOs is a type of misguided paranormal belief. He says that "many, possibly most, scientists believe it is *almost certain* that intelligent life exists on planets outside our solar system," but, because of the great distances involved, "there simply isn't enough time for extraterrestrials to get here within the time span of any conceivable lifetime" (p.139). Goode asserts that most ufologists "are unconcerned with this problem, but it vexes scientists so much they feel it is insurmountable. Hence, the belief that UFOs are real is regarded by scientists as paranormal" (p.139). This illustrates the chasm between mainstream science and ufology. If UFOs are alien

craft they might have to travel huge distances to get to Earth, but to claim that they therefore cannot get here is technologically-dependent speculation. For example, surely the first European settlers in America would have laughed if the indigenous inhabitants had asserted that they could not possibly have come from Europe because it is too far to paddle a canoe. Aliens may travel here using technology – teleportation for example – that modern science has yet to discover, and one way to investigate this is to research UFO sightings rather than ridicule them. Yet for some reason no Western space agency has acknowledged an interest in UFO research, despite the possible scientific benefits. Ironically, Paul Hill's (1995) posthumous book is the most detailed scientific analysis of UFOs yet published. Hill, who worked as a rocket scientist for NASA and its predecessor, points out that because his employer's policy was "that flying saucers are nonexistent" (p.24), he was not permitted to comment publicly about his private research into them.

Without the support of mainstream science, ufologists are at a significant disadvantage. As Professor Stuart Appelle (2000) points out, there is only one peer-reviewed ufology journal; there are no professional ufology societies; no professional annual ufology meetings; no ufology textbooks; and "Traditional sources of funding are almost nonexistent for UFO research" (p.12). Hansen (2001, p.248) compares UFO film profits with ufology research funding: "The movie *E.T.* (1982) grossed \$400,000,000 and *Independence Day* (1996) grossed \$316,000,000" while MUFON, the largest UFO organization in the USA, apparently listed a total expenditure of \$172,048 in its 1992 tax return.

Other ufology research problems are that, despite there being hundreds of amateur ufologists worldwide, it is unlikely that any of them own radar equipment that could track an anomalous flying object. It has often been claimed that leading Western nations are concealing their research into UFOs (Dolan, 2000; Fawcett & Greenwood, 1984), but this is almost impossible to prove despite the significant amount of circumstantial evidence (Good, 1989, 1996). There are several possible reasons for governments to classify information about the reality of UFOs. The USA might want to master UFO propulsion technology before anyone else, and then keep it secret for as long as possible to maintain a military advantage. Public knowledge of UFO technology might threaten oil, nuclear and stock market profits. Admitting that aliens were visiting Earth might trigger invasion concerns. Taxpayers might query enormous defence budgets if it was acknowledged that alien craft can fly into



anyone's airspace with impunity. The reported psi behaviour of aliens suggests that Western science's view of the fundamental nature of reality is seriously flawed, which might further undermine public faith in government. It is not the purpose of this research to prove the existence of UFOs or alien abductions, but a review of the relevant literature suggests that either someone is surreptitiously attempting to convince the public that they do exist, as cover perhaps for advanced weapons testing, or leading Western nations are secretly researching the UFO phenomenon. Because it is not possible to prove these claims, anyone who supports them is generally labelled a conspiracy theorist which implies that they are misguided and should be ignored. When a major UFO sighting occurs, the media generally turns to astronomers for comment, despite their lack of training in the subject. Almost all books and magazine articles on UFOs and abductions are written by amateur ufologists and are therefore not regarded as reliable by the scientific community. For example, Peter Sturrock, the then professor of space science at Stanford University, in an article entitled 'Brave New Heresies', wrote:

In 1978, I carried out a survey of the membership of the American Astronomical Society on UFOs, and I found that most of the members had open minds on the subject and that a majority thought that some research should be carried out. ... What they wanted were refereed articles published in scientific journals. The difficulty was that existing scientific journals did not carry articles on the UFO problem, and the journals that did were not accepted by the scientific community. (Sturrock, 1988, p.51)

Another taboo that undermines serious research into UFO close encounters is that aliens are seen by some as demonic entities (Downing, 1980/2001, p.155; Ritchie, 1994, p.56) which implies that abduction researchers are not to be trusted. For example, the "extreme American right-winger and head of a group called the Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson," believes that "all UFO enthusiasts should be stoned ... because if UFOs exist they are demons spiriting people away from Christ" (Casellas & Hewitt, 1999, p.2). In a study that analyses the names (onomastics) by which they identify themselves during close encounters, Jean Sider concludes that many extraterrestrials are deceptive, unwholesome or demonic entities (in Druffel, 2000, p.3). This novel research method may be disputed because it depends on the author's decision as to which names are demonic and which are not. If aliens are visiting Earth, they may be oblivious to the historical or religious origins of the names they use during close encounters.

The similarities between traditional folk and fairytales and abduction narratives, noted by Vallee (1969/1993), lead some researchers to suggest that they are not real experiences (Goode, 2000, p.157; Randles, Estes, & Cone, 2000, p.105) but may instead be produced by sleep paralysis (Pope, 1997, p.253) or electromagnetic effects (Budden, 1995, 1998). As mentioned previously, even those researchers who believe in abductions are reluctant to link ufology with parapsychology. Most ufologists have no parapsychology training and may therefore be as ill-informed or prejudiced against psi research as the average scientist. This section reveals that the sceptical and religious attitudes that mainstream science and the public have towards UFOs and alien abductions are a significant obstacle to anyone trying to research reports of levitation associated with these phenomena.

### **6.6 Martial Arts: Qigong**

Dong and Raffill (1996) state that "The more adept a master's skill at martial arts, the more will he shun publicity and keep that skill hidden" (p.54). The reason for this is that the "martial arts are considered as a health exercise and defensive technique, a means for self development, not self-aggrandizement" (p.55). They explain that an ancient martial arts tradition requires practitioners to swear not to show off their superior abilities, and only to use that power for defensive or moral purposes, such as assisting the weak against the strong. Traditionally teachers only passed on their most powerful techniques to students who they believed would not make them public. While one cannot object to these principles, they certainly restrict public knowledge and investigation of the psi aspects of the martial arts because these techniques are considered the most powerful.

When starting his advanced training, Master Chang was obliged to undergo a formal Taoist ceremony which obliged him not to use his powers for evil purposes or to make money, and not to demonstrate his abilities to anyone except his students (in Danaos, 2000, p.42). Chang was encouraged to use his powers for healing, but could not charge his patients even though he was poor and had a wife and children to support. Danaos (2000) describes what happened when he broke his promise not to discuss Master Chang's psi feats with anyone other than fellow students. While driving with a friend on a clear, sunny day, he started to describe some of Chang's abilities. Suddenly "water kept pouring down on the windshield with unbridled ferocity" (p.151) obliging him to put the wipers on at full speed. The ground outside seemed dry and they noticed that cars travelling in the opposite

direction did not have their wipers on. As the torrent continued, his terrified passenger asked whether Danaos had perhaps said something that he should not have. Realising what was happening, Danaos apologised out loud, whereupon the rain suddenly stopped. A sceptic might claim that this was merely a passing shower, but Danaos insists there was not a cloud in the sky and no other cars got wet. It is possible that the rain was, as in poltergeist theory, the result of Danaos unconsciously projecting his guilt, but, whatever the cause, the incident certainly stopped him discussing psi matters except in his books, for which he claims to have his master's permission, provided he uses pseudonyms, no addresses, and only describes qigong techniques in general terms.

Public scepticism is another reason why the empty force or psi aspect of qigong receives limited publicity. Dong and Raffill (1996) explain that one of China's empty force masters, Wang Xiangzhai, "lived in the conservative era of the 1930s, when people were loath to believe in any ability to knock people down without physical contact" (p.72), so his students would deny that they were using empty force techniques. More recently a qigong master in California warned his students not to promote the psi nature of their training too widely because of the damaging effect that public scepticism might have on his reputation (Dong & Raffill, 1996, p.72).

Similar taboos exist today. As part of my research, I contacted a leading Australian meditation teacher (Personal communication, 23 January 2003) to ask if anyone had ever levitated in his classes. He seemed reluctant to discuss the matter and refused to take my contact details, saying that he was a down-to-earth person who, although he could not prove that it was impossible, believed that people who claimed to have levitated were probably deluded. It is possible that this teacher, whose income depends on the reputation of his meditation school, does not want anyone to think of him as having an interest in psi phenomena because he is aware of public scepticism about it. Similarly, Chenery (2004, p.16) quotes Father Gabriele Amorth, "the renowned chief exorcist of the Vatican," as asserting that, among other things, séances, witchcraft, the occult, yoga, Zen and Transcendental Meditation are inappropriate activities because they are "doctrines that are unacceptable to Christians". For some devout Catholics these comments would constitute a taboo against participating in activities such as these, including qigong.

Gruber (1999) explains that in China for the last few decades there has been a dispute at the highest levels about research into psi abilities. After his retirement back to China, Qian Xuesen, who had been a professor at the California Institute of Technology, became interested in psi research (p.117). He was quoted as saying "we should use science and technology to study human potential. Thus we should study Chinese traditional medical theory, qigong, exceptional functions of the human body, and so on" (Leping & McConnell, 1991, p.125). However, a senior social scientist, Yu Guangyuan, claimed that "paranormal phenomena contradicted Marxism, Leninism, dialectic materialism and the known laws of contemporary science and that they could not, therefore, be true" (in Gruber, 1999, p.118). In May 1982 the Secretary General of the Communist Party sided with Yu and psi research was declared officially unacceptable, but, because of Qian's scientific status, a small group of scientists was permitted to continue their research. The media was banned from mentioning the subject, but the scientists could circulate their results among themselves. "Among the population as a whole the matter was soon forgotten or people wrongly believed that psi phenomena had been exposed as fraudulent and that the Party had banned their investigation" (Gruber, 1999, p.119). But the research continued behind closed doors.

The most important projects took place in a military controlled institute in Beijing. The sudden disappearance of psi from the public stage combined with the fact that the military was continuing research in secret made the Americans assume that China had now also jumped on the bandwagon of the psi arms race. (Gruber, 1999, p.119)

So, in addition to public scepticism and martial arts taboos, research into the psi aspects of qigong now labours under the additional restriction of being classified by the Chinese government. As a possible illustration of this secrecy, I attempted to contact Paul Dong, who has retired to China, through a colleague of his in the USA who later informed me that Dong had said that he knows nothing about human levitation (Personal communication, 15 January 2003), which seems puzzling given that he mentions it several times in his books. Dong may have suspected that the Chinese authorities were monitoring his overseas electronic communications. Despite these restrictions, Chinese public interest in the health and martial arts components of qigong has not been curtailed because it is a part of the country's spiritual heritage; it is only its psi aspects that seem to be taboo. In addition, Gruber (1999, p.125) claims that Chinese research into this subject is not as methodologically sound as that in the West, although, given the size of their population, they probably have a rich store of gifted subjects to study.

During my interviews with qigong teachers — none of whom claims to have levitated — they were asked whether there were any taboos about the psi aspects of qigong. Peter agrees that abilities should not be revealed for egotistical purposes but that it is acceptable to use them for medical, charitable or spiritual purposes. Bernard explains that becoming attached to the idea of demonstrating your abilities “leads your concentration astray” so that “you start projecting outwards” which can undermine one’s meditation and spiritual development. Similarly, William says that practitioners must ask themselves whether they are doing qigong because they want fame or to “develop a connection with the supreme”. Victor points out that many advanced practitioners are humble and would not want to frighten people, and Harry says that some people make the mistake of thinking that certain energies are evil instead of realising that it is the motivation of the practitioner that matters, so keeping quiet about one’s abilities is probably a wise tactic. Unlike the others, Jeremy denies that qigong has anything to do with psi and claims that, while it may be possible, no one has ever levitated. He asserts that there are no unknown energies associated with qigong, although he agrees that some masters will only reveal their abilities to others in the same field. The martial arts taboos about psi abilities reveal how difficult it would be to find and study a qigong practitioner who can levitate.

## 6.7 Mysticism

In most mystical traditions a prevalent taboo is that psi abilities are a distraction on the spiritual pathway. This acknowledges that advanced psi abilities can be used to acquire wealth, power and probably an inflated ego, which are counterproductive in any spiritual tradition. These taboos are often packaged as witty stories or parables. Dr Thelma Moss recounts

a Zen story about a disciple who left his teacher to spend years in solitary meditation. On his return, his guru asked what he had learned, and the disciple with some pride answered, ‘I have learned to walk across the river, on the water.’ Without surprise, in fact with a sigh of disappointment, the guru replied, ‘What a pity! For only one rupee, the ferry can carry you across’. (Moss, 1997, p.130)

Such stories may promulgate spiritual taboos against vanity and psi distractions within a community of mystics, but when broadcast to the wider community, as they are today, people may conclude that there is something inherently inappropriate about psi abilities, even if one is not on a spiritual pathway. If someone today learnt how to walk on water, it would be absurd to suggest that the ability should not be

used or researched. No one tells gifted chess players, mathematicians, or musicians that it is inappropriate to demonstrate or make a career out of their abilities. If human levitation does exist, there is nothing unethical about using or researching the phenomenon. Apart from telling us more about the nature of human consciousness, it is possible that the psi energy involved could benefit fields as varied as healing, transportation, or space exploration. Nevertheless, although there are many reports of levitating mystics, none of them seem to have demonstrated this ability to modern researchers.

One of my Spiritualists interviewees provided a frustrating example of this sort of taboo. Claudette claims that a few years ago she accompanied her sister-in-law to an Australian Tibetan Buddhist meditation centre. While the sister-in-law went to do her regular meditation class, Claudette, who had not been there before, was asked by a nun who was showing her around the centre if she was "interested in seeing a demonstration with some lamas that were visiting from Tibet". After agreeing, Claudette was taken to a large room where about seven or eight monks were "sitting in the lotus position, cross-legged, and without any sort of momentum being able to jump up". The monks were hopping across the room, rather like Transcendental Meditation practitioners, which Claudette does not regard as true levitation. Her guide then told her to watch a lama

who was at the front of the room, and he was actually lying on his side on the floor. ... After about two minutes I actually realized that his robes were hanging rather than tightly being around him. And that's when I realised he was actually being raised, somehow, off the floor; still lying in the lying position.

The lama had his eyes open and "one hand propping his head up, and the other just lying on top of him, by his side". She watched for about half an hour during which time the lama "would've raised probably about six feet [1.83 m] off the floor". Claudette was rather sceptical, so asked her guide what was holding the lama in the air. "Absolutely nothing," said the nun, who called a young man over and whispered something in his ear. The young man "approached the monk and ran his hand underneath him to show that there was nothing there". He then got a small, self-supporting step-ladder, "and he got to the top and ran his hand above the monk". There were several other people in the room who were as amazed as Claudette. She recalls one witness calling out that they were experiencing a mass hallucination, but she did not agree with him. Claudette, who claims to be able to see auras, noted that the levitating lama

had the most amazing golden-white aura. And I must admit I was amazed at the height ... [and] the width of his aura. It just seemed to fill the whole area that he was in; the whole width of the room.

Auras are thought to signify a degree of holiness or spiritual development (Inglis, 1986, p.169), which suggests that the lama was able to levitate because he was an advanced meditator. The lama then gradually descended to the ground. "He stayed there for a while, then he stood up, and he walked over to one side of the hall and sat cross-legged and proceeded to do the jumping" like the other monks.

Claudette, who is not a Buddhist, says that the levitating lama was referred to as a rinpoche (a Tibetan Buddhist title given to a spiritually advanced person who is regarded as a reincarnation of a previous master or senior lama). In an attempt to obtain confirmation about the levitating rinpoche, I contacted the only Tibetan Buddhist centre in that suburb. The lama who replied wrote that he knew of no visiting rinpoche who had levitated and that he was

not aware of any such demonstration. ... Our Tibetan Buddhist practice may enable advanced yogis to have such ability, but demonstrating in public will be against the code of ethics of the practitioner. Basically it is a capacity we all have, but many do not know how to apply its proper use. (Personal communication, 3 March 2003)

I asked the lama how levitation could be regarded as unethical, and he replied that

Levitation is not unethical behaviour but showing it [to] others without special reasons will be regarded as spiritual transgression. A practitioner must not show off his or her spiritual accomplishment. If he does, it breaks his vow of humility. (Personal communication, 5 March 2003)

It is hard to interpret this situation. I may have contacted the wrong meditation centre; the lama may be unaware that a visiting rinpoche levitated in front of some visitors in his centre; or he may be denying that the levitation occurred to give the impression that his colleagues have not broken their code of ethics and vows of humility. If Claudette is telling the truth, one could dispute whether the levitation she witnessed qualifies as showing off in public, as it took place within the meditation centre. If he is obstructing levitation research, the lama is helping ensure that scepticism about the subject will continue.

To explain levitation, the lama I contacted wrote that "one who can control [the] inner five elements can do many things such as levitation". These elements (called wu-hsing in Taoism) or "five phases of transformation, or five energies that determine the course of natural phenomena" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1999b, p.417) are

water, fire, wood, metal and earth and "are not to be understood as real substances but rather as abstract forces and symbols for certain basic characteristics of matter" (p.417). Claiming that levitation results from controlling these five elements is not particularly helpful, although it does suggest that a high degree of self-mastery, as in yoga and the martial arts, is needed to produce such psi phenomena.

I contacted the local representative of a Buddhist society to ask what he knew about human levitation (Personal communication, 14 February, 2003). He pointed out that no lamas from his tradition would demonstrate levitation while visiting Australia, and they would actively resist the investigation of such matters because they were of little importance to a person's spiritual development. He said that he had been studying Buddhism for nearly thirty years but that his master would still not give him any information about psi abilities.

The Buddha himself is claimed to be one source of Buddhist taboos against psi abilities. He regarded psi abilities or siddhis

equivocally because some non-Buddhist ascetics possessed them too; they were a sign of meditational attainment only, and not a spiritual qualification; and they could be put to bad as well as good use. ... He, therefore, attempted to lessen their importance by making it an offence for monks or nuns to display them before the layfolk. (Bowker, 1997, p.464)

Similarly, Woodward explains that Buddha was well aware that

with spiritual discipline (asceticism and meditation) a monk can eventually fly in the air, make his body invisible to others, and otherwise manifest the miraculous powers ... that accompany advancement towards liberation from the cycle of rebirth. But he forbids his monks from exhibiting these powers before the laity. To do so is a manifestation of vanity and therefore a sign of retrogression in the struggle to achieve liberation from attachments to a spurious self. (Woodward, 2000, p.24)

In Tantric Buddhism "Deliberate pursuit of such power is generally frowned upon by the more advanced adepts who, if they happen to acquire them, take pains not to display them except in circumstances which fully warrant their immediate use" (Blofeld, 1974, p.222). However, Blofeld also points out that "telepathy is so common as to excite no comment in Tibet. ... I have more than once had cause to redden on discovering that the Lama I was talking to had an all too accurate knowledge of my thoughts!" (p.40). Buddhist ambivalence towards psi abilities is



illustrated by a story about the Tibetan yogi Milarepa (1052-1135) who is reported to have once levitated over the heads of some distant relatives who were ploughing a field. "The man's son ... spotted the levitating monk and called to his father to stop work and observe the miracle. Milarepa's relative looked up, saw the levitating holy man, and firmly instructed his son to ignore that 'good-for-nothing' and get back to work" (Rogo, 1991, 29).

In his translation of Patanjali's yoga-sutras, Taimini points out that the various *siddhis* can become obstacles for a yogi who is

diving within the deeper layers of his consciousness because they tend to draw consciousness outwards. That is why the mystic fights shy of all such powers. He does not want to have anything to do with *Siddhis* because their exercise creates all kinds of temptations and distractions in his path. (Taimini, 1975, p.343)

Islam is equally suspicious of miracles.

In the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad rejects every request to work miracles, saying that the Qur'an is itself a miracle and the only one Muslims need. It is only in the *ahadith*, or oral traditions of the Prophet's life, that we find the miracle stories of Muhammad. (Woodward, 2000, p.24)

The Catholic Church is also ambivalent about miraculous abilities. The Croatian stigmatist Father Zlatko Sudac claims to have "the gifts of levitation, bilocation, illumination, and the knowledge of upcoming events" (Sudac, 2002), but when asked about them during an interview he declined to elaborate further until the Catholic hierarchy had made a pronouncement about the matter. Had he demonstrated his ability to levitate before some journalists there might now be less scepticism about the reality of the phenomenon. Woodward (2000) explains that the "Hebrew Bible is equally wary of miracles. Because miracles always manifest power, and because that power can come from evil as well as divine sources, miracles alone are never to be trusted" (p.24). The Catholic Church requires thorough documentation of miraculous events, but one of the problems is "that popular Catholic piety tends to confuse genuine mysticism with unusual experiences and 'supernatural' powers – a confusion which, in the opinion of saint-makers, has given sanctity a bad reputation" (Woodward, 1991, p.163). Displaying a similar attitude to other major religions, Father Gumpel explains that experiencing "stigmata, visions, levitations, bilocations, and other such phenomena" does not make a person a saint. "We are looking for ordinary sanctity. We are trying to

counter the idea that saints are people who have had unusual experiences" (in Woodward, 1991, p.163).

The Catholic Church's treatment of Joseph of Cupertino illustrates its wariness towards psi phenomena. The Church was so embarrassed by the public's reaction to his frequent levitations that he was banned from celebrating mass in public, obliged to eat his meals in private and frequently moved around the country. Pastrovicchi (1918/1980, p.15) explains that after being accused of deliberately seeking attention and performing "works which the credulous believed to be miracles" (p.15), Joseph was summoned before the Inquisition. He "was detained [for] several weeks and examined three times, but no shadow of fault was discovered and his life was found to be worthy of admiration" (p.17). Despite the persecution that he suffered during his life, Joseph was canonised after death, not because of his psi abilities but for his sanctity.

Thurston (1952) provides another reason why the Church may be cautious about publicising psi events, and why people may be sceptical about miraculous reports found in books such as *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (Butler, 1756-9/1956).

A prejudice against the literature of the supernatural seems to have been created by the uncritical methods of hagiographers. Living themselves in an atmosphere of unquestioning faith, they have accepted and repeated without discrimination all the marvels of which they found any record, and it has rarely occurred to them that the statements of virtuous and well-meaning people are sometimes as untrustworthy as those of unscrupulous romancers. (Thurston, 1952, p.1)

During their interviews most of the priests and pastors said that they had no objections to research into human levitation. As Thomas said, "I have no problem with it being researched. I think if there's a reason for it, it's good to know how it happens". However, as Philip pointed out, "A miracle to me is an act of God and purely God alone, whereas a paranormal event could have a logical human explanation". For this reason, Philip claims that

I don't believe you'll come up with some way you can get people to levitate on demand. That's not to say that ... you might be able to invent some particular machine that can defy gravity or something like that ... but in that miraculous sense I don't believe that you'll be able to recreate it.

This illustrates the belief that miracles cannot be investigated because science can never discover how God operates. For example, Michael claims that "There have

been many miracles I've witnessed over my thirty-odd years of ministry that certainly are totally inexplicable". He believes that "a miracle is something that is beyond our own investigation and comprehension". As mentioned earlier, one obstacle for those researching psi events is the religious distinction between supposedly miraculous, demonic or psi events. For example, Leroy (1928) writes that "If the levitation of mediums is regarded as genuine, the analysis of its physical characteristics and the description of its psychological circumstances preclude any likening of it to that of Catholic mystics" (p.250). Leroy seems to be claiming that the levitation of saints and mediums cannot have the same scientific explanation, which illustrates that some Christians disapprove of the idea that all forms of human levitation could work the same way. For example, because they believe that the devil sometimes levitates people, some of the interviewees said that they would disapprove of someone trying to train themselves to levitate.

## **6.8 Chapter Summary**

The theme that this chapter documents is that there are longstanding and more recent taboos against psi phenomena in many of the seven groups, as well as numerous practical obstacles to researching levitation. Religious taboos about psi events are the most prevalent and have affected almost all of the groups at some time. As Leroy (1928) illustrates, the Christian Church has demonised shamans, Spiritualists, possessed people, some cases of poltergeist activity and, today, there are those who see aliens as demonic entities.

The fact that taboos against psi activities have existed in almost every religion for thousands of years suggests that throughout that time it has been known by spiritual leaders that a significant percentage of those on the mystical pathway will develop these abilities. In other words, although the leaders may not have been interested in validating them, they were well aware that psi abilities existed and that they were capable of corrupting or distracting spiritual aspirants who were not sufficiently advanced to have overcome their normal human vanity and egotism. A sceptic might claim that the taboos were invented to mislead people into believing that divine powers exist, but the volume of anecdotal evidence about other psi abilities mentioned in the previous chapter suggests that this is not the case. Not only do these taboos imply that psi abilities exist, and are linked to spiritual entities and ASCs, but they add weight to the traditional mystical claim that consciousness

underlies physical reality, or that at some level there is a link between mind, matter and energy.

Being aware of these taboos and obstacles is important for future researchers seeking levitators to study because they provide useful information as to what cultural, religious and practical obstacles need to be addressed before such people might be prepared to demonstrate or explain their abilities. Without these taboos, people who spontaneously found themselves levitating, or had learnt to do it deliberately, would have felt free to publicise or demonstrate their abilities. Although this does not guarantee that science would by now have discovered how levitation works, it would certainly make it easier to find levitators to study. The phenomenon would today probably be regarded with less scepticism by scientists and the public, and speculative religious explanations which, from an empirical perspective, merely replace one mystery with another, would be less prevalent. Without these taboos there would almost certainly be more well-witnessed levitation reports than there are today.

## Chapter 7

## Almost Levitating

As has been pointed out previously, there are some reports of levitation and mass control that do not fall neatly into any of the seven groups. These examples are discussed in this chapter because they may reveal something about how levitation works and might even suggest that there is more than one way to levitate. In discussing these miscellaneous reports and groups it will be noted that most of them share several of the main groups' themes, which can be interpreted as increasing their credibility and relevance to this study.

### 7.1 Lung-gom

In Tibet there exists a phenomenon called lung-gom which roughly translates as "mastery of the energy currents" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1999c, p.207), and is achieved by meditation, breath control and concentration on the element of air and its corresponding psychic centre (chakra) within the body. The mastery of this particular energy current "was used, among other things, to cover long stretches on foot effortlessly and in the shortest possible time" (p.207). The air chakra is normally called the fourth or heart chakra (Johari, 1987, p.63). "Running, hunting, using strength, shrinking (contraction), and growth of the body (expansion) are related to the air element" (Johari, 1987, p.98), which is interesting because, as well as being able to levitate, on several occasions Home's body was seen to elongate while he was in a trance. Johari (1987) points out that "The heart chakra is the seat of balance within the body, moving towards a uniform energy flow in both upward and downward directions" (p.65). Lama Anagarika Govinda (1970) says that the air element is central to lung-gom because it involves learning to control one's breath through pranayama (p.81). Blofeld (1974) writes that *lung-gom*

enables people in a state of trance to cover great distances at amazing speed leaping like a ball and negotiating obstacles with supernormal dexterity. In a country devoid of vehicles and telegraphs, this must have been extremely useful for sending messages between monasteries situated far from one another. (Blofeld, 1974, p.223)

Alexandra David-Neel (1965) describes encountering a *lung-gom-pa*, who is a person using their lung-gom training "to take extraordinarily long tramps with amazing rapidity" (p.199). Because she did not wish to break his trance, she could only watch as the lung-gom-pa sped past.

I could clearly see his perfectly calm impassive face and wide-open eyes with their gaze fixed on some invisible far-distant object situated somewhere high up in space. The man did not run. He seemed to lift

himself from the ground, proceeding by leaps. It looked as if he had been endowed with the elasticity of a ball and rebounded each time his feet touched the ground. His steps had the regularity of a pendulum. (David-Neel, 1965, p.202)

David-Neel (1965) was told that lung-gom breath and meditation training can last several years, often in strict seclusion. When sufficiently advanced, the lamas are given a "mystic formula" which is repeated in rhythm with their breathing and footsteps (p.214). Another part of the training resembles the exercises that today's Transcendental Meditation practitioners use.

The student sits cross-legged on a large and thick cushion. He inhales slowly and for a long time, just as if he wanted to fill his body with air. Then, holding his breath, he jumps up with legs crossed, without using his hands and falls back on his cushion, still remaining in the same position. He repeats that exercise a number of times during each period of practice. Some lamas succeed in jumping very high in that way. (David-Neel, 1965, p.207)

According to Tibetan tradition these practitioners become very light and may eventually learn to levitate (p.208). David-Neel claims to have briefly seen another lung-gom-pa in a Tibetan forest sitting naked on a rock "with iron chains rolled all round his body" (p.209). Her assistant said that "They wear these chains to make themselves heavy, for through the practice of *lung-gom*, their bodies have become so light that they are always in danger of floating in the air" (p.210).

While in Tibet, Lama Govinda experienced something resembling lung-gom after he miscalculated how long it would take to return to his camp and, as night fell, realised that he would have to cross numerous huge boulders to get back safely.

Night had completely overtaken me; and yet to my amazement I jumped from boulder to boulder without ever slipping or missing a foothold, in spite of wearing only a pair of flimsy sandals on my bare feet. And then I realised that a strange force had taken over, a consciousness that was no more guided by my eyes or my brain. My limbs moved as in a trance, with an uncanny knowledge of their own, though their movements seemed almost mechanical. I noticed things only like in a dream, somewhat detached. Even my own body had become distant, quasi-detached from my will power. I was like an arrow that unfailingly pursued its course by the force of its initial impetus, and the only thing I knew was that on no condition must I break the spell that had seized me. (Govinda, 1970, p.77)

Although he was not actually levitating, Govinda here illustrates several of the themes that are involved in levitation. He was an experienced meditator and his surefooted leaps from rock to rock in the dark show how various psi abilities – such as clairvoyance and mass control – can sometimes work together when a person is

in a suitable ASC. Govinda's psi agility may be what advanced martial arts practitioners are attempting to achieve.

David-Neel writes that "men who travelled with supernormal rapidity are mentioned in many traditions" (1965, p.199). Charles and Jordan (1995) provide several examples from shamanism. Rather than running, the Yurok Indians of Northern California were reported to be able to glide along the ground. They

would contact 'unseen forces' and then make the trail their ally by talking to it and singing to it. Instead of feeling their feet pushing against the earth, the runners visualized the earth pushing against their feet, helping them along. And aided by breathing techniques and hand motions, the runners propelled themselves forward with an invisible rope. (Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.98)

A second example refers to an old Australian Aboriginal shaman or 'clever man' called Cranky Jimmy who set out on a four mile [6.6 km] walk to a ration station. Two younger friends followed shortly afterwards and were astonished to meet Jimmy coming back with his rations. The friends took three hours to cover a distance that Jimmy, using his spirits to take him along quickly, travelled in less than one hour (Charles & Jordan, 1995, p.104).

Several Catholic examples that resemble lung-gom are to be found among the well-witnessed visionary incidents that occurred in 1961 to four young ecstatic girls in the small Spanish mountain village of Garabandal. Most of the psi phenomena experienced by the girls were witnessed by the respected Spanish attorney and professor of economics Francisco Sanchez-Ventura y Pascual (1978). At various times the girls would become entranced and walk around the village followed by crowds of onlookers. What was so extraordinary about the way they walked was that, with "their heads craned back at an incredible angle" (p.56), and despite the rough ground, they sometimes moved so fast that people would have to run to keep up with them. In addition, the girls showed no signs of tiredness and "in summer they were oblivious to the heat and never perspired, despite the breakneck speed of their walks" (p.56). Even more bizarrely, either individually or together, they sometimes walked backwards (p.72), and occasionally "they advanced on their knees, and, once, even sitting down" (p.72). Sanchez-Ventura y Pascual (1978) writes that "the ecstatic child halted in her tracks and started to run downhill backwards, scarcely brushing the stony ground in her passage, her smiling gaze never leaving the night sky" (p.104). On another occasion he describes seeing one

of them "running backwards, her gaze piercing the gloom overhead, avoiding obstacles and pot holes as if she had eyes in the back of her head" (p.111). Numerous photographs and witnesses confirm these incidents, but they cannot verify the girls' explanation for their psi abilities, which is that the subject of their visions, the Virgin Mary, was protecting them. The Garabandal incidents, which included levitation, mass control and excessive gravitation, suggest that reports of lung-gom from Tibet and elsewhere are probably reliable and are also related to levitation. This section's examples are reminiscent of the techniques and explanations for psi abilities proposed by members of the seven groups, which include ASCs, spiritual entities or unseen powers and breath control.

## **7.2 Hypnosis, Mesmerism and Animal Magnetism**

In the days of animal magnetism and mesmerism, some European practitioners discovered that when certain subjects entered a deep or somnambulistic trance they would manifest what came to be called the 'higher phenomena' of mesmerism (Inglis, 1989, p.52). Most often these were instances of clairvoyance, such as predicting future events or seeing what was happening at a distant location, but sometimes PK events such as levitation were reported. Perhaps because of poor documentation or the scepticism of subsequent researchers, there are today few detailed reports of these levitations available. Fodor (1933/1966) claims that "In the age of animal magnetism Billot reported that his somnambules sometimes rose into the air" and that "Charpignon ... says that a mesmerist of Rouen, named Bourguignon, could lift several of his subjects from the ground by placing his hand over the epigastrium" (p.195). The epigastrium is the "upper part of the abdomen, in the angle of the ribs over the stomach" (Wingate, 1972, p.155). It lies between the third and fourth chakras and is near the dantien (qigong), so, if these reports are true, whatever caused them may be connected with these energy centres. Leroy (1928) quotes a letter (dated 3 June 1840) from Bourguignon to Dr Charpignon in which he describes one such experiment. Because Bourguignon had found that his patient's limbs would follow the movement of his own, he put his hand "two or three inches [5 or 7.5 cm] over the epigastrium, and the whole body was raised and remained suspended" (p.29). He then placed his hand "over his head and lift[ed] him up from the floor so as to be able to pass my hand or a stick several times under his feet" (p.29). Bourguignon claimed that with this patient the experiment had succeeded "eight times out of ten, but he had failed with every other subject" (in Leroy, 1928, p.29). The crown of the head is the location of the



seventh chakra which is considered the most powerful. Although Bourguignon does not say how many other patients he tried to levitate, the fact that he only succeeded with one suggests that the levitations resulted from the patient's sensitivity to whatever energy is involved, which resembles Dong and Raffill's (1996, p.42) claim about people's varying susceptibility to chi, and the Russian physicist Stern's comment about only some people having the ability to levitate using a mirror box (in Hasted, 1981, p.201).

Dingwall (1967) describes a somnambulistic girl (p.213) and some magnetised people (p.23) levitating, and Leroy (1928) quotes an 1840 report by Ricard, which claims that "a Dr Schmidt of Vienna, who wanted to magnetise his daughter for some therapeutic purpose, was very surprised one day when he found that his patient arose above her bed under his passes" (p.29). Similar results were obtained by Dr Justinus Kerner when he magnetised Frederica Hauffe (1801-1829), known as the Seeress of Prevorst. As well as having powerful clairvoyant abilities, if put into a bath while in a trance she would float "on the top of the water like a cork. If Dr Kerner placed his fingers against her own he could act like a magnet and could lift her from the ground" (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.195). Meiton (2001) says that many of the abilities of magnetised subjects were a precursor to Spiritualism. When in a trance, Hauffe seemed able to communicate with the dead; "physical phenomena were witnessed in her presence, knockings, rattling of chains, movement of objects without contact, and, in short, such manifestations as were characteristic of a poltergeist" (p.767). She also spoke languages that were similar to Coptic and Arabic (Fodor, 1933/1966, p.160). Alan Gauld (1992) admits that magnetisers often claimed that they could draw the limbs and bodies of some of their patients (p.153), but he seems reluctant to use the word levitation in this context. For example, when describing Hauffe's psi abilities he writes that she "also exhibited some much less common phenomena" (p.151), but fails to name them.

Cyril Scott describes a levitation example that resembles animal magnetism or hypnosis. Having agreed to provide a demonstration, Scott's master instructed one of his students, called Arkwright, to lie on his back.

The master stood over him, placed his hand about two feet [61 cm] above his recumbent body, then slowly raised it and Arkwright rose in the air, as if he were being pulled up by an invisible cord. He remained for about one minute suspended a yard [91 cm] above the top of the platform, then slowly sank down again. (in Moss, 1997, p.350)

No mention is made of the master putting his student in a trance or making passes over him, but the master may have already been aware of Arkwright's sensitivity to the levitation force, although this does not explain how the phenomenon works.

The term animal magnetism is confusing because it does not refer to normal magnetism. As Long (1954, p.72) explains, when a magnet is placed near a piece of metal both objects are pulled towards each other. With animal magnetism, however, the pull only goes one way which appears to contradict the laws of physics. To illustrate this, Long describes an experiment by Baron Ferson who once directed his magnetism into one of a row of light folding chairs. A young woman, who had not seen which chair was magnetised, was then asked to walk along the row and "as she came opposite the magnetised chair she was almost violently pulled down towards it" (Long, 1954, p.74). Long concludes that, "The rule seems to be that the object — regardless of its size or weight — which has the heavier charge of vito-magnetic force pulls to it the less charged object, feeling no corresponding pull on itself as a reaction" (p.74). While being trained by an African Berber kahuna (shaman), W.R. Stewart was told that "vital force could be stored in wood, stone, water and the human body, also in the invisible body of a 'ghost'. This force could be expended suddenly and thus move very heavy objects" (in Long, 1954, p.70). Vital force seems similar to chi, because, as Danaos (2000) reports, yin chi can move beyond the confines of the physical body (p.22), and, although living people are essentially yang, spirits are composed of yin energy (p.51). Similarly, Dr Serge King (1992) claims that the anomalous energy used in mesmerism and many other fields suggests "a single 'protoenergy' which is either a carrier for or an effect of all other energies" (p.xiii).

Long (1954, p.72) describes how Arthur Spray, a powerful hypnotist, once demonstrated this magnetic force on a young man. While lying on the floor, the subject was put into a deep trance causing his body to become rigid. Spray stood at his feet, commanded him to open his eyes and then beckoned him with his hand.

Slowly the head and shoulders of the subject rose of their own accord into the air, the heels remaining on the floor. Inch by inch the rigid body lifted at the head until it stood at a right angle a good four feet [1.22 m] from the carpet. It was held there for a few seconds, then the beckoning of the hand was reversed and the body slowly descended to the floor. (Long, 1954, p.72)

Where does this force come from? The man weighed over 63 kg, yet Spray felt no pull on his own body or hand (p.73). Although this was only partial levitation, the force may be strong enough to lift someone off the ground. As in other levitation reports, the force seems to be related to spirits and ASCs and can facilitate other psi phenomena such as healing. It would not be difficult or costly to conduct experiments in which a number of somnambulist subjects, who were also sensitive to chi energy, were magnetised or put into a hypnotic trance to see if they spontaneously levitated or could be drawn off the ground. If even one subject levitated it would prove the reality of the phenomenon, and although the experiment would not immediately reveal how levitation works, it might enable researchers to investigate the differences between levitating subjects and those that do not.

### **7.3 Witchcraft**

Transvection describes the medieval claim that witches could fly through the air, generally on broomsticks. This subject has always been controversial because the devil and various demons were supposedly involved in these activities, and even though some psi phenomena may have occurred, historical research suggests that most of those who were condemned for witchcraft were innocent victims of religious hysteria. Even at the time, claims of witches flying were disputed and today witchcraft researchers provide little evidence about transvection, although this may be the result of modern scepticism about psi phenomena. This research is interested in whether there exists evidence that any witches could levitate and, if so, what they believed caused it. Hughes (1965) acknowledges that there was "an accepted belief in flight as a supernatural practice. We have the possibility also of actual levitation in ecstatic states ... which might be an ingredient in the magical arcana of witchcraft" (p.132). One amusing 17<sup>th</sup> century report involves some French soldiers in Calais who fired their muskets upwards into a black cloud because they heard voices coming from it. To their surprise a fat, drunk, naked old woman landed at their feet with a wound in her thigh (Pickering, 1998, pp.230 & 481). At the trial of the Somerset witches in the 1660s, "Mrs Julian Cox calmly related how one evening she had met three people flying on broomsticks some four or five feet [1.2-1.5 m] above the ground" (Pickering, 1998, p.481). Some witches confessed to flying either physically or by imagination (Guiley, 1989, p.127) which could refer to teleportation, levitation, or out-of-body travel, but, because people accused of witchcraft were often tortured, these confessions are suspect. Doreen Valiente writes that witches used to perform

a kind of jumping dance, riding on staffs; and if broomsticks were used for this purpose, too, it is easy to see how this dance, combined with the witches' experience of wild visions and dreams of flying while in a stage of magical trance, gave rise to the popular picture of broomstick-riding witches in flight through the air. (Valiente, 1984, p.49)

Pickering (1998) acknowledges that "In reality few witches ever confessed to flying on broomsticks, although many admitted performing ritual dances at covens while straddling a length of stick" (p.74). Margaret Murray (1931/1970, p.89) claims that there is little evidence of witches flying through the air, but there are numerous references to the use of oils or ointments to facilitate travel (p.91). Also called unguents, these ointments were made using recipes that often included hallucinogenic ingredients (Guiley, 1989, p.255). In 1560, Giambattista Porta reported that, having promised to get him some information from a distant town, a witch lapsed into a trance after smearing herself with ointment. When she awoke she insisted that she had actually flown to distant locations (Robbins, 1981, p.514). This suggests that for some witches transvection involved out-of-body experiences (OBEs). Guiley asserts that modern research supports these claims:

In modern times, Dr Erich-Will Peuckert of the University of Göttingen, West Germany, tested a medieval flying ointment recipe on himself and a colleague. ... The ointment caused the two men to fall into a trancelike sleep for 20 hours, during which each had nearly identical dreams of flying through the air to a mountain top and participating in erotic orgies with a monster and demons. (Guiley, 1989, p.255)

These results are strengthened by the fact that Peuckert's colleague "knew nothing about witchcraft or the supposed effects of the witches' salve" (Valiente, 1984, p.146). In support of the OBE interpretation, Harpur (1994, p.229) notes that using broomsticks to fly is reminiscent of shamans using objects such as sticks to symbolise horses when they travel to the otherworld in a trance. If some of their activities did originate from shamanism, it is possible that some witches may have had similar psi abilities to those reported in that field, which include changing into animal forms, OBEs, levitation and teleportation. Julio Caro Baroja (1982) concludes that for centuries it was believed that certain women "could change themselves and others at will into animals"; that "they could fly through the air by night and enter the most secret and hidden places by leaving their bodies behind"; and that "they could bring about storms" (p.79). Montague Summers (1973, p.140) recounts an example where a woman saw her husband anoint his body with an ointment and then disappear from sight, which, if true, might be a case of teleportation. Similarly, Parrinder (1963) states that it was thought that the devil

could whisk witches through the air "or make them arrive instantaneously at their destination" (p.43). In answer to the question of how, if they flew in full physical form, witches could fit up chimneys and through certain windows, Summers (1973) reports that, to facilitate their flight, the devil would magically remove any obstacles (p.141). This explanation is surprisingly similar to reports where abductees claim that aliens somehow carry them through walls, ceilings, closed windows and the hulls of UFOs without injury.

Valiente (1989) claims to have acquired reliable information about witchcraft from the discarnate spirit of a male witch (or wizard) called Brakespeare. She writes that

One very strange thing that Brakespeare told me was that witches in the old days really did develop the power of levitation. He assured me that the stories of 'flying witches' were based on fact, although greatly exaggerated in popular belief. I have never personally seen a witch levitate, but I have been told by a young woman who was a traditional witch that sometimes, while dancing in a circle and totally absorbed in the rite, she has found herself becoming weightless and floating a few inches above the ground. As soon as she became conscious of what was happening, she sank to the ground again. (Valiente, 1989, p.107)

Although this claim links ASCs and levitation, I have not found any other unambiguous reports of levitation in the literature on modern witchcraft, which today is generally called Wicca or (Neo-)Paganism by its participants. Anthropologist Dr Lynne Hume (1997) reveals that many of the beliefs and activities of modern Pagans are similar to those of the seven groups, which increases the possibility that a few may occasionally levitate. For example, she writes that Neo-Pagans believe that by using ASCs it is possible to connect "psychically, with the energies around us. By focussing the mind, one can even become a human conduit for energy" (Hume, 1997, p.46). Pagans believe that magic is a natural phenomenon which can be achieved by concentrating on one's intuitive abilities and by manipulating psychic energy (p.66). Some Wiccans worship a God and Goddess although, like some Spiritualists, others see these as symbols of universal energy (p.69) with which one can learn to resonate. Advanced practitioners develop psi abilities such as clairvoyance, remote viewing and healing (Hume, 1997, p.133).

Despite the possibility that the field may include genuine cases of levitation, witchcraft has not been included among the main seven groups because the reports are too scarce, possibly unreliable, and the literature contains so many contradictory claims. Nevertheless, witchcraft contains numerous similarities to the

seven groups: invisible spiritual powers and entities are often thought to cause psi events; historically there is a close link to spirit possession; witches supposedly have a variety of psi abilities similar to those found in shamanism; trances and ecstatic states are described; and for centuries witchcraft has been the subject of cruel and often violent taboos.

#### **7.4 Kundalini**

The concept of kundalini comes from Hinduism and yoga, but for some people in Western societies it is now seen as a phenomenon that transcends religious boundaries. Kundalini refers to a dormant spiritual energy that supposedly lies coiled at the base of the spine. It may awaken spontaneously or as a result of activities such as kundalini or tantric yoga, so, although it is an aspect of mysticism, it is being discussed here because it is regarded by many as a separate field. There are books devoted entirely to kundalini (eg: Woodroffe, 1919/1974), and there are several Internet sites that record people's kundalini experiences (eg: The Kundalini Research Network, 2004). Once awakened, kundalini energy rises up the spine through the chakras "and finds expression in the form of spiritual knowledge and mystical visions" (Friedrichs, 1999, p.190). The symptoms can vary enormously "and include bizarre physical sensations and movements, pain, clairaudience, visions, brilliant lights, superlucidity, psychical powers, ecstasy, bliss, and transcendence of self" (Guiley, 1991, p.319). Hinduism traditionally categorises the physical symptoms of rising kundalini in animal terms; one may experience a hopping frog-like movement in the spine (Johari, 1987, p.31) or a bird-like movement which involves "a feeling of levitation, lightness, weightlessness, or the feeling of a sweeping, nice floating movement is felt in the spine when the air element *vayu* is dominant" (p.32). As well as possibly producing psi powers, techniques to raise kundalini energy have similarities with advanced qigong, such as breath control, sexual abstinence and (for men) the attempt to raise their seminal essence to a higher chakra (Johari, 1987, p.29). Kundalini energy can supposedly move up the spine via two channels; the *ida* carries the lunar, feminine currents, and the *pingala* carries the solar, masculine energy (Johari, 1987, pp.26-27), which resembles the division of chi into yin and yang energy. The similarities between chi, prana and kundalini suggest that they are different cultural descriptions of the same energy which, if managed appropriately, may facilitate human levitation. Guiley (1991, p.366) speculates that these energies may also be the equivalent to the magnetic fluid or force that Mesmer and his colleagues

claimed to work with. Dr William Tiller (1975, p.273) proposes that the chakras are the equivalent of transducers which have the potential to tap into cosmic power. Similarly, Swanson (2003) sees the chakras as "higher dimensional structures" which, when synchronized, may "form an even higher dimensional structure which can coordinate and access energy which is not normally available" (p.139). Leadbeater (1927/1994, p.18) believes that "certain European mystics were acquainted with the chakras". His evidence is a colour plate in a 1736 book by the German mystic Johan Gichte! which clearly shows all seven chakras. Guiley (1991) claims that "various examinations of mystical literature and traditions show that *kundalini*, known by various names, apparently has been a universal phenomenon in esoteric teachings for perhaps three thousand years" (p.320). She reports that since the 1970s there have been an increasing number of reports of kundalini awakenings in the West because descriptions of the phenomenon are readily available and more people are following various Eastern spiritual traditions (p.320). This accounts for Christina and Stanislav Grof (1991, pp.73 & 77) including kundalini awakening among their list of spontaneous spiritual emergencies. Leadbeater (1927/1994, p.81) warns that the premature awakening of kundalini can be dangerous, which is also the case when advanced neikung practitioners store chi in the dantien (Danaos, 2000, p.109), which equates to the third yoga chakra. The California psychiatrist Lee Sannella (1987) claims that, in an unprepared Westerner, the awakening of the kundalini can simulate medical problems such as psychosis, hysteria, heart attacks and gastrointestinal diseases.

A search of the mailing list archives on the Kundalini Gateway (2004) website produces several references to personal experiences of levitation over the last few years. However, some discussion participants use the term levitation to refer to OBEs, some are discussing second-hand levitation reports and others are ambiguous or unwitnessed. For this reason I have not included kundalini among the seven groups although the field overlaps with mysticism, yoga and qigong and there is every possibility that some kundalini experiencers have levitated.

### **7.5 Mass Control and Excessive Gravitation.**

Murphy and White (1978) note that occasionally dancers and athletes such as basketball players appear to undergo "uncanny suspension" (p.101) whereby they stay in the air slightly longer than seems possible. Many athletes report feelings of peace, stillness, detachment and altered perceptions of time and bodily awareness

when they achieve their peak performances, which the authors believe is a mild and spontaneous version of the religious ecstasy that mystics experience when they levitate. Murphy and White (1978) suggest that "the discipline and training of sport and dance, plus situations calling for rising in the air — as in basketball, ballet and the broad jump — combined with conscious or unconscious breathing exercises, may trigger a rudimentary form of levitation" (p.104).

Similarly, in his discussion of human levitation, Fodor (1933/1966) mentions the elevation of famous dancers (p.201) such as Maria Taglioni, Augustus Vestris, Vaslav Nijinsky and N.P. Damaschhoff. He writes that "there is little doubt that the *élévation* of famous dancers demonstrates the rudimentaries of levitation" (p.201). Fodor claims that these dancers seemed able to hover in the air at the highest point of their jumps. Fodor (1964) notes that, although many people have commented on the height of Vaslav Nijinsky's leaps, "The greater mystery of remaining up and coming down slower than the law of gravitation would demand is passed over in silence by most of the writers" (p.23). Fodor interviewed Nijinsky's widow Romola, herself a dancer, who said that, when asked how he managed to stay up in the air, Nijinsky did not understand why others could not also do it. "He could control his descent, and could come down slower or quicker as he wished" (p.24). Nijinsky apparently inhaled before he jumped and only exhaled after he landed, which suggests that breath control was involved. Romola recalled that one of their children's governesses, who had worked in India, had told them about Hatha yoga, which led Nijinsky to become very interested in the subject. Romola explained that

Nobody was allowed to enter his dressing room before the performance. No one could speak to him after he came out. He never answered. He looked, and acted, like a stranger. When once, in admiration, I told him what a pity it was that he could not see himself, he answered in all seriousness: "But I do. I always see myself. I am detached. I am outside. I make myself dance from the outside." (in Fodor, 1964, p.24)

Fodor concludes that "there is a similarity between the psychic state of Nijinsky on the stage and the *lung-gom-pa*" (p.25). Romola's evidence suggests that, by using breath control and ASCs, Nijinsky enhanced his natural dancing ability with a slight degree of levitation or mass control.

In 1931 Captain J. Alleyne Bartlett is reported to have made himself several pounds lighter, using only his willpower, at a lecture to the London Spiritual Alliance (Melton, 2001, p.916). Bartlett did not actually leave the ground, but his mass control ability



may be a precursor to levitation. Joseph Weed (1968, p.161) describes seeing a woman at an American fairground who used a weighing machine to show that she was 140 pounds [63.5 kg] but, after she stepped into a basket, Weed found that he could easily lift her with one hand. The woman claimed that both she and her mother had the same ability. She had never been able to levitate completely, but since she was a child she had at times felt very light and always floated down when she fell. Holding her hand over diaphragm she said "You can just make yourself feel lighter in here" (in Weed, 1968, p.161). This appears to be an example of inherited mass control ability, but the report does not explain why she pointed to her diaphragm. Although this spot is near the epigastrium and the third and fourth chakras, the woman may have meant that she could alter her weight by breath control. What distinguishes her from members of the seven groups is that she did not appear to have a belief system to explain her mass control ability, which would also probably mean that she had no literature on the subject, no exercises to perform, or role models apart from her mother.

There may be a close link between mass control and excess gravitation (becoming so heavy that one cannot be moved) because they seem to occur to people from the same groups and sometimes in conjunction with levitation. For example, Melton (2001, p.910), quotes the example of the spirit medium Alberto Fontana "who, after a levitation, remained as if nailed to the floor, and nobody was able to move him". John Cornwell (1991) recounts an example from Garabandal. On one occasion, Conchita, one of the young girls, while in ecstasy, pleaded with some of the adults in her kitchen to lift her up because she could not reach "Our Lady's lips" (p.143).

So three of us ... attempted to lift her, but we could not raise her one millimetre from the floor; she was like a ton of rock. Jacinta Gonzalez Gonzalez, one of the other visionaries, was with her, and came forward after we had become exhausted with our efforts. Little Jacinta, who was just a slight child, lifted Conchita upwards with the tips of her fingers. She lifted her right up to the ceiling. ... After Conchita had made the gesture of kissing her vision all of us saw her float back slowly, right back, ... until she was absolutely horizontal. Jacinta brought her down holding only her legs. Then she let go of her legs and Conchita remained floating about a hand's height above the kitchen floor for several moments. We all stood absolutely amazed. I could have run my hand between the floor and her body, but I was rooted to the spot. (in Cornwall, 1991, p.143)

The witness also explains that "while Conchita defied the laws of gravity, her dress was never in immodest disarray" (p.143), which matches other descriptions of levitating women. These reports seem to suggest that the same energy or spiritual

power is involved in excessive gravitation, mass control and levitation, which challenges the theory that levitation is produced by a force that annuls gravity, because at times it appears to enhance it.

## 7.6 The Lifting Game

Descriptions of the lifting game involve a variety of techniques. The most common is that four standing people lift a seated subject by putting both forefingers, or the first two fingers of one hand, under the subject's knees and armpits. This means that the subject is being raised by a total of eight fingers, which sceptics claim is sufficient to lift the average person, thus supposedly excluding any psi explanation for the sitter's apparent loss of weight. A variation is that, before lifting, the sitters put their hands on the subject's head and push downwards. Although it is not full levitation, unless a better explanation is found, the lifting game may be a form of mass control. Richard LeFors Clark (2004) provides a complex technique which he terms "human diamagnetism antenna levitation". He claims that, for maximum effectiveness, the four lifters must include two males and two females and must stand diagonally opposite each other at 45 degrees off magnetic north, south, east and west. Before they lift, they must stack their hands alternately on the subject's head so that no one has both hands touching each other and each hand only touches that of the opposite sex. Exerting a steady downwards pressure, they must count to ten and then quickly lift the sitter using the first finger of each hand under the knees and arms. He asserts that without first putting their hands on the subject's head the lift will be impossible. Clark does not document any experiments to confirm this claim, and different procedures described by other lifting game participants suggest that he is mistaken.

Amanda (personal communication, 14 July 2003) claims that when she was ten she frequently participated in the lifting game in the school playground. After lying flat on the floor, "I would put myself into a trance-like state of relaxation where I imagined that I was dying". The six lifters would each chant "You are injured" followed by "You are sick," "You are dying" and "You are dead". They would then together chant "On the count of ten we will raise your body up from the dead unto the heavens and your soul will rise up". Amanda reports that "By the time they had counted to ten, I could feel my soul leave my body and I felt as light as air. When I opened my eyes and realised I was off the ground to about waist to shoulder height I would come back down with a bump". Amanda says that, because her body

became so light, the six lifters (one at her head and feet and two on each side) were only using their fingers to guide her body as it levitated into the air. They tried to lift other girls but only succeeded with Amanda. She says that when she opened her eyes to see what was happening, she would drop back to the ground because "the connection of the energy state I was in became broken". A sceptic might claim that the memories of an entranced ten-year-old with closed eyes should not be trusted. Although not a clear example of levitation, Amanda reveals similarities with other levitators. She describes an ASC; she says that she has had psi abilities from childhood; she is currently involved in spiritual healing (personal communication, 16 July 2003); and claims guidance and visitations from angelic beings; all of which might explain why her peers could lift her but not others. Amanda's claim that she could feel her soul leave her body may also explain Stern's claim that the Russians call levitation 'partial death' (in Hasted, 1981, p.201), and the report of a woman's body becoming extremely light shortly after she died (in Spees, 2001, p.272).

Some researchers assert that breathing exercises produce the weight loss during the lifting game. The psychical researcher Dr Hereward Carrington conducted experiments where he put four lifters and a seated subject onto a large scale. The technique required the lifters to "bend forward several times in unison, inhaling and exhaling deeply together. The person seated in the chair also inhales and exhales at the same time. On the fifth count all five persons hold their breath" and the seated person is lifted (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.37). Although the combined weight of the lifters, chair and subject was 712 pounds [323 kg], on each of five successive lifts, a weight loss of between 50 and 60 pounds [23-27 kg] was recorded (p.37). The weight loss "slowly returned to normal as the subject was held for some considerable time in the air" (in Fodor, 1933/1966, p.37). Apart from the suggestion of mass control, no conventional scientific explanation has been proposed for the lifting game. Why would the lifters breathing in unison help reduce the sitter's weight in Carrington's experiment, or did both the lifters and sitter briefly lose weight? It might be helpful if the experiment was repeated with each person's weight being recorded separately to see precisely what happens.

Dr Thelma Moss (1997) has included the lifting game in several of her parapsychology classes and reports that "the success of the experiment is in the rhythm with which these simple movements are carried out" (p.125). Initially Moss requires the lifters to put their hands on the sitter's head before they lift, but claims

that once they have established a good rhythm, this procedure can be discarded. "All that seems necessary is for the four persons to chant a phrase in unison five or six times. Any phrase will do, provided it is done *in rhythm*" (p.125). This suggests that for some reason the physical and psychological coordination of the lifters is essential. A concept called 'brain coherence' put forward by some parapsychologists to help explain PK may also apply to the lifting game. Brain coherence means that "the firings of the billions of neurones in the brain occur more 'in step' with one another" (Swanson, 2003, p.269), thus significantly increasing the power of whatever they are doing. Coherence is also linked to the idea that the mind can somehow transcend the physical brain and access a non-local realm of consciousness and energy. Lynne McTaggart (2001) uses the term zero point field to describe this realm in which energy and consciousness appear to merge. Once again, this concept is an updated version of what yogis and mystics have been saying for thousands of years: that, at the deepest level, consciousness and the fundamental nature of reality are one. Laboratory research into PK abilities appears to reveal that people who are bonded in some way (such as couples) can produce a more powerful combined PK effect than the sum of their individual abilities (McTaggart, 2001, p.156). Although this does not explain how levitation or mass control works, it suggests that brain coherence is produced by the ritual nature of the lifting game. By simultaneously breathing, chanting and/or putting their hands on the sitter's head in unison, the lifters may achieve a level of consciousness coherence that they cannot reach individually, and this may briefly cause their combined PK abilities to reduce the subject's weight. In Amanda's case, her psi abilities combined with the lifters' chanting may have produced sufficient weight loss for her to almost levitate. Perhaps people with psi powers can achieve a significant level of brain coherence more easily than others. Certain ASCs may facilitate brain coherence, which might explain why so many levitators do so while in religious ecstasy. The fact that the lifting game seems to depend on cumulative group coherence produced by the rhythm of the lifters suggests that the force that facilitates psi phenomena is universal and can transcend the individual mind. Although this may begin to explain what is happening in the brains of people who levitate, it does not explain exactly what PK energy is or how it works.

### **7.7 Transcendental Meditation (TM)**

Because of the publicity it has received in previous years, a link between Transcendental Meditation (TM) and levitation, or at least hopping while sitting

cross-legged, exists in the minds of many Westerners. Although they have been largely secularised, most of the beliefs and practices of TM derive from Hindu and yogic traditions and are closely linked to the breathing exercises and mantra repetition of pranayama. As Richards (1980, p.81) points out, many ancient Indian texts explain that pranayama practitioners will experience several stages of development. The first involves perspiration; at the second stage the body may tremble; and at the third it may start hopping or jumping about like a frog; once this stage is mastered, levitation may follow. The symptoms of stage two may vary considerably and, according to Richards (1980, p.83), are actually a sign that one's kundalini is awakening. Part of the TM-Sidhi course, which has been available to practitioners since 1976, includes what is called 'yogic flying' which has three stages: "Stage One is generally associated with what would be best described as 'hopping like a frog'. Stage Two is flying through the air for a short time. Stage Three is complete mastery of the sky" (Wuebben & Wuebben, 2004). Since it commenced, the TM-Sidhi course has caused some controversy because, although it is claimed that over 100,000 people have attended and there have been several media demonstrations of stage one, no one has publicly revealed their capacity to levitate. A few participants have sued the TM organisation because they did not learn to levitate despite the high cost of the course. Nevertheless, the organisation claims to have comprehensively researched yogic flying and has published a lot of information about its supposed connection to consciousness.

Although it does not show anyone levitating, the TM video *Yogic Flying* (n.d.) shows several practitioners bouncing along on mattresses with their legs in the lotus position. They are obviously some of TM's most agile 'flyers', and the apparent ease with which they hop suggests that mass control may be involved. In the video, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi explains that the "bubbling bliss" that the flyers experience as they hop along is because their brains are in a state of increased coherence which enables them to experience "transcendental consciousness". The Maharishi asserts that the "managing intelligence of the universe" which he also calls "the unified field" lies within everyone and, once accessed, can enable advanced practitioners to do almost anything. In an interdisciplinary TM journal, Dr John Hagelin (1987), the Professor of Physics at Maharishi International University (now Maharishi University of Management), acknowledges that

Certain sidhis, for instance levitation, appear to violate the classical laws of Newtonian gravity and general relativity, which at first sight

would seem highly implausible. However, neither Newtonian gravity nor general relativity represent consistent theories of gravity from a quantum-mechanical standpoint, and it might become necessary to reassess the circumstances under which these classical theories can be expected to apply. (Hagelin, 1987, p.79)

As a solution to this problem, Hagelin suggests that

The phenomenon of levitation, with its implied control over the local curvature of space-time geometry, would appear to require the ability to function coherently at the scale of quantum gravity, which is the assumed scale of the super-unification and the proposed domain of pure consciousness. In this way some of the *sidhis*, if demonstrated under laboratory conditions, would provide striking evidence for the proposed identity between pure consciousness and the unified field. (Hagelin, 1987, p.80)

In a more recent TM video on the physics of flying, Hagelin (1996) expands on these ideas to explain how psi phenomena such as human levitation work. He claims that there exists a link between the quantum scale of reality and pure consciousness, which can be reached through deep meditation. Hagelin asserts that the classical laws of nature, such as gravity, are not absolute but are statistical laws based on deeper quantum mechanical principles. The microscopic controls the macroscopic, so, once one has accessed the level of consciousness that equates to the unified field, one's intention or willpower can tip the statistical balance and produce seemingly miraculous results. Gravity has to be changed at the microscopic level because it is only there that it is united with other forces within the unified field (Hagelin, 1996), which may be another term for what others call the zero point field.

Hagelin's assertions about a link between consciousness and the unified field seem to be an updated version of the ubiquitous mystical claim that consciousness underlies the whole of physical reality. But, although the existence of PK phenomena suggests that these claims may be true, the empirical evidence linking mind and matter is still disputed by most scientists, and, while physicists may be looking for a unified field or theory of everything (TOE), they do not yet seem to have found one. So, to explain yogic flying, Hagelin is linking two popular but as yet unconfirmed scientific ideas. It is also puzzling that none of the many TM-Sidhi practitioners seem to have progressed to the levitation stage. If any of them did levitate, the evidence suggests that the TM organisation would be keen to publicise such an achievement. For example, although the term 'flying' is an exaggeration, an article in the *Des Moines Register* (Pierre, 2003) describes

the high drama of the yogic flying competition, which took place ... in the Golden Dome at the Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield. Organizers said it was the first public competition of its kind in 10 years. The 14 male participants maxed out at about 2.5-foot [76 cm] heights and 5.5-foot [1.68 m] distances, and accomplished 25-metre dashes as fast as 14 seconds, all while hopping from a full-lotus position. (Pierre, 2003)

Despite this publicity, it is possible that TM yogic flying does not lead to human levitation, or perhaps the organisation is cautious about encouraging its practitioners to progress to this level because of the link between kundalini arousal, hopping and levitation. As mentioned earlier, the awakening of kundalini can be erratic, unpredictable and sometimes dangerous, unless the practitioner has the strength and clarity to control it (Leadbeater, 1927/1994, p.30). Another possibility is that the TM organisation has its own taboos against revealing that some of its advanced practitioners can genuinely levitate. An experienced Australian TM practitioner claims that, after meditating for about twenty years,

[I] started to experience rushes of energy up my spine during periods of transcendence in meditation. These progressed until my body began to lift off the bed (I usually meditate sitting up at the head of my bed). Nowadays, in just about every meditation, my body lifts off the bed two to three times. It feels like a distance of ten to twenty centimetres (judging by the thump I make on the bed covers). It's basically straight up and down. I don't think I'm suspended very long. Various members of my family have witnessed me, and one time I broke the base of the bed when I landed. (Personal communication, 1 February 2004)

This suggests that some advanced TM meditators may experience what seems to be the beginning of levitation in association with kundalini awakening, but, until evidence of genuine levitation is produced, the link between levitation and TM remains hypothetical. Nevertheless, TM has similar features to the seven groups. Their beliefs and meditation practices are a form of secularised mysticism which involves ASCs, and, although their levitation claims appear to be exaggerated, some mass control seems to be involved. TM's claims about a link between brain coherence and psi phenomena such as levitation reflect the beliefs of some parapsychologists but, given the number of enthusiastic subjects in the organisation, it is puzzling that they appear to do so little scientific research into PK.

## **7.8 Chapter Summary**

Most of the groups discussed in this chapter are closely connected to each other and the major themes. For example, witchcraft is often linked to spirit possession and many of its techniques and beliefs are thought to derive from shamanism.

ASCs and breathing techniques seem to be involved in the levitation or mass control experienced by a few ballet dancers, the lifting game, lung-gom and in hypnosis, mesmerism and animal magnetism. Transcendental Meditation (TM) is related to kundalini, and its hopping and levitation techniques derive from Hindu and yoga traditions. This seems to reveal that almost all instances of human levitation require that the levitator either has latent psi abilities, and/or is involved in ASCs, breath control, or interactions with spiritual entities. Several of the groups mentioned in this chapter, such as lung-gom, mass control, the lifting game and TM show that, although levitators are very rare, there is a significant number of other people who seem to almost levitate. Although there is no guarantee that all these activities are precursors to levitation, they may be worth investigating in case they are. For example, researching the lifting game, which uses normal people as sitters, would probably be much easier than finding a levitator to study.



## Chapter 8

## Conclusion.

**Research goals and methodology.** The fact that no modern scientific investigation of human levitation appears to have been published suggests that most scientists do not regard the phenomenon as real, probably because it seems to contradict the basic laws of physics. However, in my opinion the anecdotal evidence suggests that levitation does exist, and other evidence suggests that some benefits might flow from discovering how it works. Parapsychologists classify levitation as a form of PK and would prefer to study it in a laboratory, which would be difficult to achieve because the phenomenon is generally described as rare, unpredictable and involuntary. In an attempt to overcome some of these research obstacles this qualitative research project is designed as a precursor to a parapsychology investigation, and its methodology reflects the three basic concerns of that discipline, which Irwin (2004, p.7) claims are authenticity, underlying process and phenomenology. As stated in the Introduction (Chapter 1), when applied to human levitation, authenticity is about whether there are any grounds for believing that the phenomenon is genuine. Underlying process seeks evidence that might explain how levitation works, and the phenomenology component asks levitators and witnesses what the experience of levitation is like. As Irwin (2004) writes, "phenomenological research is useful in generating hypotheses for investigation in process-oriented research" (p.8).

Instead of disregarding the gradually increasing historical collection of human levitation reports, as the scientific community is doing, and without attempting to prove that individual cases are genuine, this research project has sought information about the nature of the phenomenon by looking at the body of levitation reports as a whole. This data may help persuade empirical researchers to take the scientific anomaly of human levitation more seriously; it may assist them in finding people who levitate, as well as generating some useful research hypotheses.

**1)** The primary component is a thematic comparison of historical and modern human levitation reports, and of the seven groups that have traditionally produced them, to see what major physical, cultural and phenomenological circumstances the levitators and their groups have in common, because this information may strengthen the case for authenticity and help future researchers investigate the underlying process questions. Interviews have been conducted with a selection of

people from three of the groups: some Christian priests and pastors, Spiritualists and qigong instructors have been asked whether they have experienced or witnessed levitation and what their opinions are about its causes. Some people who claim to have levitated have also been interviewed. Information from some of these interviews has been used to enhance both the thematic comparison and the hypothesis-generation exercise.

**2)** The second component is a hypothesis-generating exercise; if the phenomenon is genuine, the circumstances, beliefs and explanations surrounding traditional levitation reports might help explain what causes or facilitates it. The suggestions and observations made in this section focus primarily on possible links between some current parapsychological theories, the nature of consciousness, especially ASCs, and whatever energy might be involved in psi phenomena such as human levitation. It is hoped that this information will assist future parapsychology investigators to research levitation from a more empirical perspective.

### **8.1 Thematic Comparison.**

The five major themes that are documented in the preceding chapters are so closely connected that at times they are hard to distinguish from one another. They are: a belief in spirits and spirit realms; a belief in spirit possession; the experience of altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and breath control; reports of levitators' other psi abilities; and group or religious taboos and obstacles against developing, displaying, or investigating psi abilities. These themes seem to be the most relevant to an investigation of human levitation because they are the main similarities between the groups that traditionally produce these reports, and they are largely about hypothesised spiritual powers that most of the groups believe can facilitate psi events.

**Spirits and Spirit Realms.** Most members of the seven groups believe that various types of spiritual entities exist, such as spirits of the dead, gods, demi-gods, angels, demons, or inter-dimensional beings. Sometimes — especially in qigong — spiritual powers are perceived not as personal entities but as impersonal energies such as chi or prana. Some mystics claim that it is possible for the mind to create independent or semi-independent spiritual entities, such as Tibetan tulpas. Spirit realms are invisible to the normal person; they have no precise geographical location but are generally claimed to interpenetrate physical reality in a multi-

dimensional manner. All the groups attribute divine, magical, or psi abilities to spiritual entities or powers and treat them with great reverence or, in the case of demons, attempt to banish or avoid them. Similarly, some abductees are fearful of aliens — whom they may regard as spiritual entities — although others welcome their attention. In all seven groups, the power of spiritual entities or energy is the most common explanation for spontaneous or involuntary human levitation, although some members claim that with sufficient meditative training one can learn to levitate voluntarily by accessing this power oneself without the assistance of spirits. Whether couched in personal (eg: spirits) or impersonal (eg: chi) terms, this first theme is the most popular way to explain how levitation works, and the subsequent four themes are dependent on the apparent existence of the psi powers that originate from these hypothesised spiritual realms. The primary question that this theme raises is whether there really exists an invisible, multi-dimensional realm that is somehow linked to consciousness and which contains discarnate entities and/or powers which at times facilitate psi events. It seems unlikely that all seven groups would invent a similar explanation for levitation if it was completely untrue. A second question is whether this explanation largely just replaces one mystery with another.

**Spirit Possession.** Members of these groups engage in activities such as prayer, contemplation, meditation, or trances that they hope will bring them closer to spiritual beings or powers. This may be done to seek protection, spiritual guidance, clairvoyant information, contact with the dead, improved martial arts abilities, or psi results such as healing. To varying degrees these activities lead practitioners to claim that spiritual entities can intrude into or completely take over their consciousness, although many modern researchers believe that these are merely psychological disturbances. In some, such as spirit mediums and shamans, this intrusion may be voluntary and temporary, but in spirit possession, poltergeist activity and some abductions it is involuntary and difficult to stop. Levitation and other psi events may occasionally occur during voluntary or involuntary spirit possession. As an extension of the first theme, the possession theme is believed to explain some levitations and suggests that consciousness interfaces the hypothesised spirit realm, although claiming that spiritual entities cause levitation explains little about how levitation works. Within most of the seven groups there is evidence that practitioners who are highly trained in their group's conceptual map of these realms are the least likely to become involuntarily possessed and the most

likely to be able to levitate at will, which again suggests a link between consciousness and psi abilities.

**Altered States of Consciousness and Breath Control.** It seems that everyone who levitates does so while in some form of ASC, such as trance or religious ecstasy. ASCs may vary significantly among the groups; a mystic may sit impassively in deep meditation, whereas entranced shamans can display intense physical activity and psi abilities that are completely different from their normal behaviour. Among those that employ the technique, breath control is frequently used to enter ASCs and is believed to assist in accessing universal or life energies, such as prana or chi which, like spirits, are claimed to facilitate psi abilities. Like the theme of spirit possession, this third theme of ASCs and breath control is linked to a belief in spirit realms because many group members believe that certain ASCs enable one to access these realms and the powers or entities they contain. The ASC theme is only partially explanatory because, although almost all levitators enter ASCs, these states are not seen as the cause of levitation but as a means of accessing its cause(s) which are believed to be spirits or spiritual energies. Because consciousness and ASCs are already the subject of several academic disciplines, from a scientific perspective this theme may perhaps be the most fruitful one from which to research levitation. Although they are uncertain about the reason, parapsychologists are aware of a correlation between ASCs and psi events (Radin, 1997, p.105). Science has only a limited understanding of the nature of human consciousness, nevertheless this theme, like the previous two, suggests a link between psi abilities such as levitation and what appear to be transpersonal dimensions of the mind.

**Levitators' Other Paranormal Abilities.** Within the seven groups there is a small number of people who seem to have a remarkable range of psi abilities in addition to the ability to levitate. These include healing, fire invulnerability, clairvoyance, teleportation, radiance, weather control and extrasensory interaction with animals. There are no psi abilities that are exclusive to any one of the groups. This seems to confirm that some aspect of the groups' members' behaviour triggers or enhances psi abilities and that these powers are not culturally dependent: they cross geographical and religious boundaries with ease, although useful abilities such as healing are more prevalent than less productive ones like levitation. The young age at which some people develop psi abilities suggests that they may have a genetic

component. Not all group members welcome all psi events; demonic spirit possession and poltergeist activity are certainly not sought after, although shamans and mediums often seek a variety of psi powers. There often seems to be a complex, human-like intelligence behind psi abilities, especially in cases of poltergeist activity, which appears to strengthen the suggestion of a link between these abilities and consciousness. This fourth theme is closely linked to the previous themes. Group members generally propose the same explanations for other psi abilities as they do for levitation and these abilities can overlap or occur simultaneously which suggests that at some level they may be powered by the same energy. Learning how one psi ability works may therefore help explain some of the others.

**Taboos and Obstacles.** Most of the seven groups have either longstanding or more recent cultural taboos against developing and demonstrating psi abilities. There are also numerous practical difficulties that researchers need to overcome if they wish to investigate these abilities. These result largely from the fact that psi abilities are so often unpredictable, involuntary and supposedly caused by invisible entities. Most religions accept that some advanced mystics have healing or other psi abilities that they claim are divinely inspired, but, with little justification, they tend to demonise reports of similar abilities from members of other groups. This fifth theme is the most varied among the seven groups – for example Spiritualists may seek psi powers while mystics do not – and does not reveal very much about how levitation works. But most of the taboos against developing or displaying psi powers have a religious origin, which implies that in those circles it has long been known that activities such as meditation and ASCs will produce psi abilities in some practitioners that may subvert their spiritual progress or produce unfavourable publicity. This appears to strengthen both the probability that psi abilities such as levitation exist and that they are linked to consciousness. It also links the taboo theme to the previous four themes and suggests that there may be more people who can levitate voluntarily than the groups have traditionally acknowledged.

**Almost Levitating.** The miscellaneous groups discussed in Chapter 7 either produce levitation reports (eg: animal magnetism) or something that seems directly related to it, such as lung-gom or the lifting game. The fact that these other groups display similar themes to the seven major groups supports the relevance of the five themes to a study of human levitation and again strengthens the authenticity

argument. Given the difficulty parapsychologists would probably have in finding levitators to study, these miscellaneous groups offer several helpful research approaches to what seem to be precursors to levitation.

**Summary.** Although the thematic comparison cannot verify any particular levitation report, as is argued in the next section (8.2), the range of similarities between the reports strengthens the probability that the phenomenon is genuine. There appear to be two main variable factors in levitation cases. These are whether they are voluntary or involuntary in nature, and whether the levitator hovers in one place or flies through the air. Joseph of Cupertino did both on different occasions. Some people from groups such as shamanism, qigong and mysticism appear able to levitate at will, while people who are supposedly possessed by demonic entities, those affected by poltergeist activity and most alien abductees, appear to have no control over their levitations and are often thrown through the air. Some Spiritualists who levitate appear to have a slight amount of control while others have no control, whether they hover or fly a trajectory. People who are levitated by others generally hover. Another feature involves demoniacs being involuntarily levitated upside down without their clothes falling down.

The thematic comparison suggests that, from a future research perspective, the link between human levitation and ASCs is the most important similarity between the groups. Everyone who levitates appears to do so while in an ASC. Some may be in a deep trance while others may be in such a shallow trance that witnesses do not realise it. People who are levitated by others always seem to be in a trance. Further research into human consciousness and the ASCs that levitators experience seems to be an important pathway to investigate how levitation works. To varying degrees, all the groups believe that ASCs enable people to access spiritual realms containing entities and/or powers that can transcend the known laws of physics. This suggests that the empirical sciences need to continue the investigation into whether there is an unknown, transpersonal force that links some aspect of human consciousness and physical reality.

## **8.2 Hypothesis Generation.**

With a subject as baffling as human levitation, a qualitative hypothesis-generating exercise should ideally produce several ideas which may be relevant to further research. The anecdotal evidence of authenticity suggests that human levitation

warrants further research. The other ideas discussed in this section have been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, issues such as PK, consciousness and spirits seem relevant because they are frequently mentioned during the thematic comparison. This does not guarantee that these topics will eventually explain human levitation, but it would be unwise to ignore them at this stage. Secondly, some of the topics to be discussed below (eg: brain coherence and zero point energy) are already being investigated by the empirical sciences, and are linked by some parapsychologists to psi events. There is little point in producing a research hypothesis that is so vague that it merely replaces one mystery with another and offers no starting point for a laboratory investigation, but, as most researchers know, many historical discoveries started off as little more than tentative ideas, so some issues raised in this section are somewhat speculative. Another problem is terminology: as the thematic comparison reveals, different groups use different terms to describe what may be the same phenomena, whereas empirical researchers often prefer to use words with few historical or religious connotations. At times this can cause confusion. For example, are those who personify (eg: spirits) describing the same thing as those who do not (eg: chi)? While discussing the hypotheses in this section it is assumed that some of the terms used by scientists, and in the groups' explanations for psi events, may be describing the same phenomena from a different perspective.

**Authenticity of Levitation.** Speaking of PK in general, Irwin (2004) claims that "the consistencies in spontaneous PK case reports do testify to the authenticity of this parapsychological phenomenon" (p.107), but, in his opinion, they do not constitute proof. The research in this thesis cannot verify the reality of human levitation, largely because, as parapsychologists such as Irwin claim, this can only be done in a laboratory. However, because there are marked similarities between the circumstances, beliefs and explanations surrounding levitation reports from the seven groups, it seems reasonable to suggest that the phenomenon is genuine. In other words, although it is not conclusive, the authenticity evidence now seems strong enough to justify further scientific research into the subject. Given that the cases in this study cover a time span of nearly two thousand years, and have originated from a variety of cultures and locations, the most likely explanation for their thematic similarities is that these levitators and witnesses are describing the same physical phenomenon. Minor differences in beliefs about the causes of levitation can be explained by varying cultural influences, but descriptions of the

phenomenon and the circumstances under which it occurs appear to remain reasonably consistent. If these people have been falsifying levitation reports for some reason or have all been deluded, it seems unlikely that there would be such similarities in their descriptions and explanations.

A sceptic might claim that, in order to seem convincing, people falsifying levitation reports have copied them from other groups. Members of all seven groups attempt to interact with unseen spiritual powers that can supposedly facilitate psi abilities, but most of them have taboos about developing and displaying these abilities, so why would they make up psi reports that seem to break those taboos? It is equally unlikely that similar levitation reports are the product of mistaken observations because human levitation is so different from other physical activities. It is difficult to mistakenly observe a person hovering half a metre off the ground, which Leroy (1928, p.180) claims is the height of the average levitation. Leroy (p.184) also notes that most levitations last for several minutes and that Joseph of Cupertino and some others were reported to have remained in the air for over an hour. These heights and durations provide ample opportunity for witnesses to observe the phenomena. As mentioned previously (Section 4.7), Sister Anne testified that she observed Teresa of Avila levitate in religious ecstasy about 50 cm off the ground for half an hour and that she passed her hands under Teresa's feet (in Leroy, 1928, p.72). If all levitation reports are delusional, surely they would vary considerably more than they do and would not be as confined to members of the seven groups. Mental illness is not limited to these groups, so there would be people from all walks of life making delusional levitation claims, but I have not found any such reports. If the reports are produced by spiritual groups attempting to prove that their gods are more powerful, the levitation descriptions would over the centuries probably have become increasingly exaggerated, which is not the case. Despite the extraordinary nature of the phenomenon, the most likely explanation for the thematic consistency of the world-wide body of levitation reports is that genuine psi events are being described.

**Causes of Levitation.** Out of the general population this research has narrowed down those who levitate to seven main groups and a small number of miscellaneous ones, and has shown that they have several themes in common. In seeking further information from the thematic comparison we can ask what it is that distinguishes levitators from other members of their groups. If their beliefs and



spiritual activities trigger human levitation, why do the other members not levitate? Leroy (1928, p.187) says that no more than four percent of Christian saints are reported to have levitated. So what causes them to levitate and not their colleagues? Going one step further, we can ask why it is that levitators do it so infrequently. For example, Leroy (1928) calculates that over thirty-five years the average frequency of Joseph of Cupertino's levitations was about three times a year (p.187). Most other levitators only do so once or twice in a lifetime. Even if these low frequencies are partially the result of religious taboos against displaying psi abilities, what caused Joseph and others to levitate on those occasions but not at other times? The dominant themes that distinguish the seven groups from the public at large are a belief in and an attempt to get to know, to interact with, to tap into, to merge, or resonate with unknown spiritual powers which some members personify and others do not. The most common way of doing this is by entering voluntary or involuntary ASCs, and almost all levitators do so while in these states. Given that parapsychologists accept that there is a correlation between ASCs and psi events, it seems probable that what distinguishes levitators from other members of their groups is a rare combination of three factors: a belief in spiritual entities or powers; physical activities such as prayer, meditation, or séances; and certain ASCs. There is a difference, however, between whatever might cause levitation and its actual mechanism. For example, if an entranced physical medium successfully requests to be levitated by a spirit, we can conclude that that behaviour caused the levitation, but, from an empirical perspective, it does not prove that spirits exist; it does not explain the force or energy that lifts the person into the air; and it does not eliminate the possibility that other levitations may occur under different circumstances. But, whatever the mechanism or force, the evidence suggests that it is reasonable to conclude that ASCs and communicating with or tapping into spiritual powers are activities that significantly increase the probability of levitation. Heath (2003, p.21), too, concludes that "an altered state of consciousness (ASC) seems to be a helpful, and perhaps necessary, condition" for levitation.

The spirit medium example above illustrates the difference between external and internal activities. The thematic comparison refers to spiritual beliefs, physical activities and internal states such as ASCs. Some of these, such as séances or meditation, can be observed, but do not reveal the precise nature of a person's ASC. For example, two Buddhist monks could be seen meditating in an identical

fashion, yet a recording of their brain activities may reveal that one spends more time at a lower brain frequency than the other. But this method of observation has its limitations. Even if the monks' brain frequencies did match, there could be other aspects of their ASCs which science cannot yet detect. The evidence from levitators such as Home and some of the interviewees suggests that inherited abilities may assist some people to levitate, perhaps by enabling them to enter an appropriate ASC more easily. The existence of these unobservable internal factors implies that, although one can conclude that certain beliefs and physical activities increase the likelihood of levitation, there are probably other important consciousness criteria which we can only speculate about at this stage.

The capacity to enter certain ASCs, therefore, seems to be the most likely explanation for such a small percentage of the groups' members levitating, despite many of them having the same spiritual beliefs and regularly carrying out the same physical activities. Leroy (1928) quotes a claim by Dr Imbert-Gourbeyre that "only 500 members of the Franciscan Order have experienced ecstasy in the course of the last five centuries — that is, about 1 in 6,000" (p.187). Most mystics levitate during religious ecstasy, but this does not guarantee that it will happen to everyone in this type of ASC. The Tibetan lama who Chatterjee (1887, p.727) saw deliberately levitating after meditating for an hour illustrates this point. Millions of people frequently meditate, but how many of them ever levitate? We can speculate that, to be able to levitate, the lama, as well as possibly having a suitable genetic predisposition, had undergone sufficient meditative training to be able to achieve a level of consciousness that generates or resonates with a non-local energy that can levitate him. Some people in ASCs may accidentally achieve this state of consciousness and involuntarily levitate for a brief time without realising why it occurred, but it is probable that most people's ASCs are not sufficiently focussed or coherent to produce this psi energy, even if they do know that it exists. The internal spectrum of ASCs appears to be so wide and varied that it is probable that the consciousness state that facilitates levitation is rarely accessed successfully. When one adds in the taboos against developing and demonstrating psi abilities, the understandable fear that spontaneous levitation can produce, and its lack of social or practical application, it is not surprising that so few people levitate. So, the seven group's thematic similarities suggest that, not only is levitation probably authentic, but it also seems reasonable to believe that some aspects of their members'

behaviour cause it to occur, and that the most likely candidate is certain voluntary or involuntary ASCs.

**Levitation Energy.** If human levitation does exist, it seems to use a force that is accessible during certain ASCs and which can be reached more easily with practice. Science claims that there only exist four fundamental energies: the strong and the weak nuclear forces, electromagnetism and gravity. It is unclear whether levitation uses one or more of these forces or an unknown force. It seems unlikely that levitation is just the result of gravity being nullified, because that would only enable the person to be weightless, like astronauts in space, whereas most levitators hover in a fixed position and others fly meaningful trajectories or levitate other people off the ground with them. This implies that whatever causes human levitation has a variable propulsion force that is linked to consciousness and/or has an intelligence of its own. Spiritualists believe that levitation is facilitated by spirits, but this does not always seem to be the case. As mentioned previously (Section 5.2), sometimes the temperature in a séance room drops significantly before a PK event such as levitation, which could mean that heat is somehow being converted into psi energy. Spirits may be doing this, although at present science cannot explain it. Those who levitate voluntarily appear to use ASCs to control impersonal spiritual forces such as chi. Some qigong practitioners claim that to levitate one needs appropriate amounts of yin and yang chi, and they link heat with yang chi. Yin chi can supposedly be accumulated via meditation or obtained from a spirit, so whether it is controlled by human consciousness or a spirit seems irrelevant because the energy may be the same.

Some psi events seem to involve a form of electromagnetism. Chi has yin and yang components and in electricity there are positive and negative charges, and magnets, including the Earth itself, have north and south magnetic poles which can either attract or repel. Levitation too seems to have an opposing phenomenon, called excessive gravitation (Melton, 2001, p.910), which fastens people to the ground rather than lifting them up, although it is not clear whether this is the levitation force working in the opposite direction or a different PK force. These similarities suggest that, rather than being a completely different type of energy, levitation and other psi phenomena may be linked to an unknown aspect of electromagnetism. Electromagnetism is one of the body's major forces (Smith & Best, 1990; Taylor, 1976); for example, nerve impulses within the brain and the

body consist of "a travelling wave of chemical and electrical changes" (Lafferty & Rowe, 1994, p.400). Home (1863/1972) writes that while levitating "I usually experience in my body no particular sensations than what I can only describe as an electric fullness about the feet" (p.39). Danaos (2000) observes that when Master Chang passes his chi through other people it feels to them like a powerful electric shock, but that on a meter it "displayed neither voltage nor amperage" (p.17). Nevertheless, there appears to be some connection with electromagnetism because, as Chang claims, "I can withstand household electrical current indefinitely without pain, but I cannot light up a light bulb" (p.17). Paranormal researchers have noted that psi phenomena appear to flatten or short-circuit batteries used in recording equipment (Heath, 2003, p.17). Swanson (2003) reports that research into people with PK abilities, including healers and qigong masters, has shown that they can "generate very large voltages in their body, and to project beams of 'charge' several feet away" (p.68). This force often seemed to originate from energy centres such as the second chakra or the dantien (Tiller, 1997). Wilson (1981, p.361) notes that various types of psi phenomena, including poltergeist activity, frequently have an electromagnetic component and, as mentioned earlier (Section 5.5), abductees often develop Electrical Sensitive Syndrome. Several researchers (Evans, 1989; Gaddis, 1968; Shallis, 1988) have noted that throughout history there have been people with bizarre abilities that seem to be related to electromagnetism, such as the capacity to make metal objects stick to their bodies (Harvey-Wilson, 2002, p.33). Budden (1995, 1998) asserts that UFO close encounters and abductions are produced by people's sensitivity to powerful electromagnetic fields, and Persinger (eg: Persinger & Cameron, 1986) is frequently quoted as having demonstrated a connection between electromagnetic fields and the experience of anomalous events. John Hutchinson has shown that by combining a large array of electromagnetic devices he can occasionally produce what appear to be psi phenomena, including the levitation of heavy objects. The nature of these events is unpredictable and human levitation has not occurred, but the Hutchinson Effect closely resembles many of the events found in poltergeist activity (Budden, 1998, p.62). This might seem to imply that some psi events are caused by a form of electromagnetism, although Cook (2002, p.386) points out that the Effect is probably enhanced by Hutchinson's unconscious PK abilities. Irwin (2004, p.133) reports that there are several objections to psi being mediated solely by electromagnetism. For example, psi does not seem to obey the inverse square law and Faraday cages do not inhibit experimental subjects' psi abilities.

There are several possible explanations for the occasional similarities between electromagnetism and psi events. Some events may be caused by electromagnetism while others are not, or an unknown energy may exist that at times resembles electromagnetism. Another possibility is that whatever causes psi events may somehow transcend the four basic forces of physics. In other words, whatever lies behind psi energy may be capable of mimicking, distorting, or overriding one or more of the four basic forces of physics in order to achieve its goal. This matches the earlier suggestion (see Chapter 5) that, despite their varying nature, all psi phenomena are caused by the same underlying force and/or intelligence. After reviewing the extraordinary abilities demonstrated by advanced martial arts practitioners such as Aikido's Morihei Uyeshiba, and the opinions of the Jesuit parapsychologist Father Oscar Gonzalez Quevedo, Dr Glen Barclay (1973) hypothesises that whatever force is being used by these people "really cannot be purely physical in its nature or origin, although the effect of its operation in the physical universe is apparently subject to some limitations by physical factors" (p.127). Although it may be related to the four normal energies, the psi force seems to be the product of a non-local domain that contains a mixture of consciousness and undifferentiated energy, which is accessible using ASCs, and which seems able to sustain spiritual entities. A more precise description of this realm is not possible until science can better define consciousness and the transpersonal material or field that appears to sustain it beyond the body. Nevertheless it appears that a future definition of this levitation-facilitating realm will have to blend energy and information-processing concepts in a manner that science currently does not understand. As discussed later, researchers such as Laszlo (1996, 2004) have proposed that the zero point field may satisfy these criteria.

**Psychokinesis.** Modern parapsychological research concentrates largely on micro-PK, such as the capacity to affect computerised random number generators (Jahn & Dunne, 1987; Radin, 1997), whereas levitation is classified as macro-PK. To date, no evidence has been produced that micro- and macro-PK use different energies, although it is possible that they do. When PK is used to influence a line on a computer screen, to bend a piece of metal, to heal someone at a distance, or control the weather, an invisible force seems to be acting at a distance, whereas levitation is something that occurs to one's own body, but the energy involved may be the same. As in poltergeist activity and spirit possession, it is unclear whether the levitation force is external (spirits) or internal (unconscious PK powers).

However, if human consciousness interfaces with a spirit or transpersonal realm, these are not two different explanations but merely different ends of the same spectrum. Some levitation examples seem more complex; for example, where does the force come from when someone is put into a trance and is seemingly levitated by another person, as in animal magnetism (Section 7.2)? It is unlikely that the levitation force is different from that used in other PK events because to say this implies that there are several unknown forces that science has failed to discover. The fact that there do not seem to be any psi abilities that belong uniquely to only one of the seven groups suggests that all these people are accessing the same undifferentiated PK power which can be directed into different tasks. In other words, entranced animal magnetism subjects and a levitating lama may be raised by the same energy acting in a slightly different way. The way psi abilities can blend with each other (eg: levitation and teleportation) and with normal physical abilities (as in the martial arts) suggests that the PK force naturally penetrates or resonates with human biology. Any research breakthrough into the link between PK, energy, consciousness and matter may therefore help explain human levitation.

**Information.** One theory to explain PK, which may therefore apply to levitation, involves the concept of information. Some parapsychologists have suggested that, when experimental subjects appear to use PK to bias the output of random-number-generators, what is happening is that "the random bits are being mentally *forced* to change from purely random to more orderly" (Radin, 1997, p.279). In other words, information is somehow being inserted into an otherwise random system. Radin (1997) explains that "what seems to be happening in mind-matter interaction phenomena is better described in terms of exchanges of *information* rather than by the application of conventional forces" (p.279). To help explain the origin of this theory, Jahn (1995) notes that early science progressed from an interest in physical mass to the concept of energy, but that "over the past few decades, a third physical currency, *information*, has taken centre stage, and clearly will dominate basic science and its applications over the foreseeable future" (p.400). One of the historical problems with theories that purport to explain the unknown is that they often reflect the dominant scientific concepts of the time and are soon discarded when a more sophisticated concept emerges. Davies (1999) notes that "history provides examples where a concept from technology has been projected onto nature and used to construct a cosmology" (p.3). For example, the invention of computers has introduced the notion of "nature itself being a computational

process" (p.3). Davies warns that, although such metaphors may be accurate in some ways, they do not describe physical reality precisely. This warning is relevant to levitation research because throughout this study the term 'energy' has been used to describe the hypothetical levitation force. But, although it might indeed be an unknown energy, the term could mislead researchers into thinking that it must comply with science's understanding of how conventional energy forces operate, whereas it may in fact work quite differently.

The dominant theory proposed by members of the seven groups is that levitation is caused by a non-local spiritual energy from another realm or dimension. Smith & Best (1990, p.258) point out that, because energy is required for one material system to influence another, an explanation is needed for the proposals that "knowledge, or information, has an objective existence outside the constraints of space and time and [that] it is possible for a system to become more ordered as the result of an input of information" (p.258). In other words, they are saying that if PK events such as levitation are to be explained as the insertion of the appropriate information into a physical system, "it must be possible to enter into the world of physics from outside time and space without any energy requirements" (p.258). Attempting to explain PK in informational terms can be seen as a technical version of the perennial mystical claim that consciousness somehow underlies physical reality. If this theory has some validity, the way a person psychokinetically inserts information into an internal (eg: levitation) or external (eg: healing) physical system may be via ASCs. This is similar to the suggestion made by Transcendental Meditation (TM) practitioners and others that deep meditation enables a person to access a unified field which can facilitate psi events. Many psi abilities seem to reveal that, at a deeper level, some aspect of human consciousness can move beyond the constraints of space and time into a transpersonal or non-local realm. However, even if this is how psi events occur, it does not explain the nature of the energy involved. As Hasted writes:

In the dualistic approach which we favour, a mind is capable of operating according to its own laws, without these being determined mechanically by the laws of physics. Only the interface must conform to physical laws, and it is this interface which we are investigating in parapsychology and psychic research. (Hasted, 1981, p.248)

Despite what Hasted thinks, the proposed interface between mind and matter may not conform to conventional physical laws, so researchers should perhaps not make this assumption unless they find evidence to confirm it.

**Spirits, Consciousness and Energy.** The spiritual energy theory that emerges from the thematic comparison suggests that levitation is caused by powers that originate within a non-physical, spiritual realm that is accessible by certain ASCs. This theory is similar to Radin's (1997, p.255) transcendental monism and Woodhouse's (2001, p.232) consciousness and energy monism, because with minor variations all three theories suggest that physical matter and energy originate from, and/or are controlled by, a transcendent source that is primarily composed of consciousness. In general terms this theory can be called the *open model of the human mind*, which assumes that the mind has at least two levels: a physical level that operates within the biological brain and is therefore limited to a particular time and place, and a transcendent or mystical level which is non-physical and non-local and which most people only learn about when they have an OBE, NDE, or at death itself. It seems that many members of the seven groups, unlike the average person, are interested in learning to access this higher level of consciousness because of its remarkable potential. They believe that at this level all minds are connected, forming or interfacing with a multi-dimensional spiritual realm in which consciousness and energy merge or interact, thus facilitating psi phenomena. Sometimes called 'the perennial philosophy', this theory has been advocated by numerous writers and mystics (eg: Bucke, 1901/1969; Maharaj, 1984; Wilber, 1985), although most of them seem to regard its psi implications as irrelevant. This realm supposedly interfaces with the physical world at all levels, hence Evelyn Underhill's (1915/n.d.) definition of mysticism as "the art of union with Reality" (p.3). 'Reality' in this sense appears to include all visible physical matter, as well as generally invisible phenomena such as energy, consciousness and whatever else exists that the average person cannot detect. The existence of this interface between mystical consciousness and reality may help explain why some group members can communicate with or control animals, fire and the weather. ASCs are found in all seven groups because they seem to be needed to access this realm.

Unfortunately, this theory contains so many unsubstantiated components that a scientist who wanted to investigate the matter would probably not know where to begin his or her research. Most researchers who debate whether spirit possession and poltergeist activity are caused by internal or external forces do not subscribe to the perennial philosophy, whereas for shamans, mystics, Spiritualists, advanced qigong practitioners and many alien abductees, most of its claims are fundamental to their beliefs. Within these groups, the question of whether psi events are caused



by internal or external forces is generally resolved by the assertion that consciousness can transcend the physical body and by the claim that the personification of spiritual forces is largely for convenience or symbolic. For example, as Blofeld (1974) explains, Tibetan Buddhist spiritual entities are seen as "symbolic representations of the phantasmagoria that haunts the threshold of human consciousness" (p.38). Personifying ubiquitous spiritual forces may help believers relate to them but it seems to confuse many researchers, although advanced practitioners from the groups seem able to transcend these conflicting explanations. Shamans talk about spirits yet acknowledge that they have to go within themselves to access the forces they need to carry out psi tasks. Mystics from all religions speak of omnipresent gods and spirits yet go inwards to access them or, as with tulpas, to create them. Spiritualists believe in spirits, but also describe 'spirit' as a ubiquitous and intelligent psi force. Some alien abductees are accused of being deluded or possessed (internal forces) while others assert that aliens are independent, multidimensional beings. Aliens can sometimes be contacted using séances and, as with shamans, abduction experiences may occur during dreams or visionary experiences. Some advanced qigong practitioners believe in spirits, but most describe chi as a transcendent, universal life energy that exists all around and within us. Rather than arguing about the internal or external source of spiritual or psi forces, what we seem to have here is the problem of defining the boundaries of human consciousness. A person who believes that human consciousness cannot transcend the brain will probably regard spirits as external or deny that they exist at all, while those who believe that consciousness is not limited to the physical brain may accept that spiritual entities or forces can be accessed by going inwards, yet may still describe them as transcendent. The fact that most members of the seven groups adopt the latter perspective suggests that further impartial research into ASCs and the open model of the human mind will probably yield answers about how levitation and other psi abilities work.

**Subtle Energies.** When John Keel (1957) asked Nyang-Pas if he could teach him how to levitate, the lama replied "It is not something you can learn overnight. It is a matter of will" (p.186). Nyang-Pas does not explain exactly what he means by this, but the farmer Mikhail Drogzenovich (in Chapter 4) also claimed that he uses will-power to levitate. As discussed in that section, if the term will-power is used to refer to person's voluntary psi ability — for example a qigong master who can throw an opponent backwards with no physical contact (Dong & Raffill, 1996) — it appears

that most people would require considerable meditative or consciousness training to achieve such will-power. This raises the question of what precisely it is within such a person that is being strengthened. This research appears to reveal that what is happening with such practitioners is that they are strengthening their capacity to focus their minds or consciousness while in an ASC. This reflects the claim that human beings appear to have access to a hierarchy of energies that may facilitate psi phenomena as well as normal physical activities. At the top is conscious decision making or will-power and, although it is the most subtle and its energy may currently be hard to detect, it seems capable of directing other more conventional and detectable energies such as those used by human muscles. Some parapsychologists use the term 'downward causation' (Radin, 1997, p.260) to describe this proposed hierarchy of effects, and, although this idea offers no empirical explanation for levitation, it does acknowledge that even someone who can deliberately levitate may be unaware of what energy is involved further down the hierarchy, or how it works. Despite many years of meditative training, all the levitator may know is how to focus his or her will-power sufficiently while in a particular ASC. In other cases the actual energetic mechanism that facilitates levitation may be able to function unconsciously or independently of human conscious control, which might explain why some levitators prefer to claim that spirits are involved. Some researchers are currently investigating what they term 'subtle energies' on the assumption that there probably exist levels of conventional energies or new types of non-local energies that are beyond the range of current scientific measuring devices. Many are seeking subtle energies in healing (eg: Dossey, 1999; Gerber, 2001). None are investigating levitation but, as this research has shown, the same psi power may be involved in both phenomena. Shamans are primarily healers and also sometimes levitate. Joseph of Cupertino once healed a nobleman by levitating him. Chi energy can be used to heal people and for levitation. Most books on chi are about healing rather than psi abilities. Jahnke (2002) discusses the possible connections between modern physics and subtle energies such as chi. Mack (2000a) discusses subtle energies in detail, as does Gruber (1999, p.166). Although these researchers are not concentrating on human levitation, because psi energy appears to be undifferentiated at its most fundamental level, any discoveries made by these and other investigators about subtle energies may also help explain levitation.

**Brain Coherence and Zero Point Energy.** In recent years the assertion that consciousness accesses an unknown realm or field that facilitates psi abilities has been described in several ways: as the unified field (Hagelin, 1987), as the holographic paradigm (Talbot, 1991), as the zero point field (McTaggart, 2001) and as the synchronized universe (Swanson, 2003). These theories may largely be describing the same phenomena, but it is beyond the scope of this research project to review all their supposed scientific justifications. Instead, this section will summarise the claims about brain coherence and the zero point field, and note their similarities with the perennial philosophy. Swanson (2003) claims that “the synchronization of the various fields and biological systems of the body may be a key to understanding PK” (p.68). Synchronization or coherence refers to a large number of brain cells or body energies working in unison, which apparently increases their combined power considerably. Physicists also use the term coherence with regard to non-biological energies working in unison. An example of the increased power produced by coherence is the difference between torch beams, which use incoherent, out-of-phase light, and laser beams which use coherent, in-phase light. The Transcendental Meditation (TM) organization has for years claimed that EEG studies (eg: Orme-Johnson & Haynes, 1981) have shown that when practitioners’ bodies lift off the ground while hopping around – which they call ‘yogic flying’ (see Section 7.7) – their brain wave activity shows a maximum level of coherence (*TM-Sidhi Program*, 2001). The TM research does not specifically focus on a correlation between PK and brain coherence, but they do claim that yogic flying is a precursor to human levitation, which might suggest that an even higher level of brain coherence could produce levitation.

Swanson (2003, p.269) claims that the psi effect of a number of brain cells working in unison increases by the square of their combined individual power. If this is true, it could mean that an appropriate degree of brain coherence could produce a noticeable psi result whereas those same cells working incoherently would not. Swanson (p.271) also claims that deep meditation increases the degree of brain synchronization, thus facilitating psi abilities which cannot be achieved in normal consciousness. Religious rapture and shamanic ecstasy may be symptoms of brain coherence, which might explain why so many mystics and shamans levitate while in these ASCs. A phenomenological equivalent of brain coherence may be found in the traditional advice that meditation practitioners should learn to still the background chatter within their minds, which is often done by focussing on a

mantra to exclude other mental activity. As mentioned previously (in Chapter 4), this training significantly increases the signal to noise ratio between what one is concentrating on (signal) and background mental activity (noise). When advanced practitioners focus, for example, on a desire to levitate it is probable that their consciousness has a much higher degree of coherence than someone who has no such training. Rebecca singing with her friends (Section 4.5) may have produced sufficient coherence to enable her briefly to walk on water. If coherence can significantly increase normal bodily energies, it is possible that some psi events are not an unknown energy but a normal biological energy that has been temporarily increased in power through synchronization. For example, it has been found that some energy healers and qigong masters can produce electrical voltages in parts of their bodies that are up to ten thousand times higher than normal (Swanson, 2003, p.69). Jahn's (1995, p.402) reference to one of his successful mind-machine PK subjects resonating or falling in love with the machine suggests that the mind can also become coherent with an external object. Coherence, however, does not explain how some psi phenomena appear to override the normal laws of physics.

Dr Ervin Laszlo (1996) explains that the zero point field is to be found in the quantum vacuum which is defined as what remains "when all other, more conventional forms of energy vanish" (p.180). This field underlies the entire universe and was the source of what is colloquially known as the Big Bang. All the energy and matter in the current universe supposedly originates from this source. Zero point energies "are the very source of the electromagnetic, gravitational, and nuclear forces of the cosmos" (Laszlo, 1996, p.180). Physicists claim that energy can be obtained from this field provided it is stimulated in an appropriate fashion (Cook, 2002, p.336). Laszlo (1996) notes that the energy density of the zero point field is apparently astronomically greater than anything within the known universe, so "the observable universe floats, as it were, on its surface" (p.181). Laszlo explains that a group of Russian physicists has produced a "torsion-field theory of the physical vacuum" which claims that "all objects, from particles to galaxies, create vortices in the vacuum. The vortices created by particles and other material objects are information carriers, linking physical events quasi-instantaneously" (p.187), because 'torsion-waves' move within this realm considerably faster than the speed of light. Laszlo (1996) points out that because "the neurones in our brain create and receive torsion-waves, it is not only particles that are 'informed' of each other's presence ... but also humans" (p.187). This, he believes, can begin to

explain ESP abilities and the non-local qualities of sub-atomic particles. "In the emerging vision living organisms are linked with one another, interrelated by the holographically information-conserving and -transmitting field that pervades the universe. They all communicate together, dance the cosmic dance with each other" (Laszlo, 1996, p.206). If these claims about this "vacuum-based holofield" (p.214) are true, tuning in to this zero point field using ASCs may facilitate ESP. Laszlo does not discuss PK in any detail. If this realm mirrors every aspect of normal biological consciousness and is the source of all forms of energy, accessing it appropriately may enable the mind to control some of that energy. This might explain why the various psi abilities mentioned in Chapter 5 suggest the existence of an underlying, undifferentiated energy that not only seems to be related to electromagnetism and gravity but also possesses a form of intelligence. Furthermore, Laszlo (1996) says that if the zero point field reacts to and permanently records everything that occurs within our brains, "our consciousness may be, in a sense, immortal" (p.215). This could mean that physicists may eventually find themselves validating the existence of independent, non-physical bundles of consciousness that have traditionally been called spirits. These zero-point ideas reflect the perennial philosophy and various mystical claims in several ways. For example, Buddhism claims that the ultimate, undifferentiated state of consciousness is the Void, which, rather than being empty, constantly sustains reality in a "boundless flux" (Blofeld, 1974, p.62). What some Christian mystics call the Godhead might also be a reference to the zero point realm. As Laszlo (1996) writes, "*Matter and mind are both real but they are not fundamental: they evolved together out of a still deeper level of reality.* The roots of both matter and mind extend into a deeper layer of reality that in itself is neither mental nor material" (p.207).

This theory suggests that those who can levitate at will have learnt to access or merge with what one could call the mirror image or echo of their biological consciousness that exists within this realm, thus gaining partial or temporary control of whatever forces underlie gravity and electromagnetism. This might also help explain the mystical instruction about the need to still one's biological mind in order to access the non-local, transcendent level of consciousness. This might mean that the nature of the energy used by levitators who hover differs slightly from those who fly a specific trajectory, but both are using ASCs as a method of control. Those who levitate entranced subjects may put them into coherent ASCs to facilitate access to whatever energy is needed. If spirits exist within this realm, they may act as

beacons for physical mediums to resonate with to achieve the requisite degree of brain coherence to produce psi effects. In brief, the zero point theory can be combined with the idea of brain coherence to suggest that, because normal brain activity only perturbs the zero point field to a minor extent, ASCs are needed to produce enough brain coherence to facilitate psi effects such as human levitation. However, as Swanson (2003, p.235) points out, although zero point energy is an integral part of modern quantum mechanics theory, most mainstream physicists have no interest in its possible connection to psi phenomena. This means that at this stage this hypothesis about how human levitation might work is a mixture of scientific fact and informed speculation, so more research from a variety of fields is needed before it can be confirmed.

**Summary.** Each part of this hypothesis-generation section seems to point towards an open model of the human mind which asserts that consciousness is capable of transcending the biological brain. Mainstream science largely adopts the theory of materialistic monism which claims that "matter causes mind, that the mind is essentially a function of the activity of matter in the brain. The basic stuff of the universe is matter and energy" (Radin, 1997, p.255). But this limited model can only be accepted if numerous psi anomalies are ignored or rejected. The beliefs of the seven groups examined in this thesis would make more sense, and psi phenomena would be more easily explained, if an open model of the mind were correct, but at this stage the theory has not been verified conclusively despite having been in existence for several thousand years. In general terms the groups' beliefs and their anecdotal psi reports postulate the existence of a multi-dimensional realm or field that interfaces or interpenetrates our physical universe. The hypothesised qualities of this realm are that it stores information in a non-local manner, and appears capable of controlling or overriding what physicists claim are the four basic forces of nature. The human brain is believed to be an interface device between this realm of transpersonal consciousness and physical reality. The realm only seems accessible using certain ASCs. Because of their lack of appropriate training, and possibly their genetic inheritance, most people, therefore, do not seem to have voluntary or conscious access to this realm. As the thematic comparison reveals, the activities and beliefs of all seven groups contain elements of mysticism, which can be seen as the art of attempting to transcend these barriers. The belief that certain people can transcend the physical body to access this realm assumes that humans have a soul or spirit, but, as Braude (2003, p.292)

asks, what is the nature of the 'stuff' that survives death? This research cannot answer that question but, if this realm is able to sustain clairvoyant information, spirits, Taoist immortals, tulpas and other seemingly intelligent entities, then, to use computing terminology, it would surely need to be composed of a substance that has highly sophisticated information storage and processing capacities. In addition, if this realm can facilitate human levitation and other PK phenomena, it would need to contain large amounts of energy and the capacity to create, dematerialize and teleport matter, as well as being connected to human consciousness. As Woodhouse (2001) puts it, "All things emerge from and are sustained by a common source, which may be labelled in various ways" (p.232). In his opinion this source "is neither just consciousness nor just energy, but transcends and includes the very distinction between them" (p.232). Laszlo (1993, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2004) continually reviews the scientific evidence for the existence of such a field although he does not discuss its connection with PK. Nevertheless, at present, the suggested link between brain coherence and the zero point field appears to be the most promising research hypothesis to explain human levitation and other psi phenomena.

### **8.3 Suggestions for Future Research.**

This study has demonstrated that research topics most closely related to psi abilities such as human levitation are PK, the transpersonal or other-dimensional nature of ASCs, forces such as chi or prana and phenomena such as brain coherence and zero point energy. For example, are chi and the zero point field the same source of psi energy and, if so, does brain coherence help access it? Some of these topics are harder to research than others, but some have an empirical nature that can be investigated fairly easily. Finding and suitably documenting someone who can levitate voluntarily, or involuntarily using hypnosis or mesmerism, would demonstrate that the phenomenon exists, but it would not necessarily explain how it works. Measuring the levitator's brain patterns might reveal that the energy involved or the relevant aspect of consciousness requires more advanced scientific equipment and concepts than are currently available. During this research I interviewed six people who claimed to have levitated, but all of them said it was spontaneous and involuntary, so were unable to provide a demonstration. Four of them claimed that someone witnessed them levitating but, because the events occurred several years ago and/or in different parts of Australia, I have been unable to confirm any of the reports. None of them could explain why they levitated on that

particular occasion and not at some other time. Nevertheless, it seems that the best research idea is to find someone who can levitate at will, but, failing that, the following suggestions may also help us understand the phenomenon.

**1) Chi.** According to Danaos (2000; 2002), qigong is one of the most precise techniques for developing and investigating PK abilities. Numerous researchers are investigating the healing effects of chi, but only a few discuss its link with PK (Barclay, 1973; Danaos, 2000, 2002; Dong & Raffill, 1996, 1997; Swanson, 2003; Tiller, 1997). Further research into the paranormal aspect of chi, which is supposedly being carried out by the Chinese government (Gruber, 1999, p.124), may produce useful information about levitation and other psi abilities.

**2) Spiritualism.** Although they are timely and bold, the investigations into life-after-death and the nature of spirits by Schwartz (2002) and Braude (2003) do not set out to explain their connection to psi or PK phenomena. In the course of this levitation study, eleven Spiritualists, ten Christian priests and pastors and nine qigong instructors were interviewed (see Appendix). The Spiritualist sample produced three levitators and three levitation witnesses; one of the Catholic pastors claims to have levitated; and two of the qigong instructors have witnessed someone levitate. In addition I interviewed an abductee (Laura) who claims to have levitated, and Alison who says she levitated twice during yoga classes. This suggests that human levitation is more common than parapsychologists appear to believe. Levitation probably occurs most often among Spiritualists because they deliberately attempt to interact with spiritual forces and entities, and normally welcome psi phenomena as confirmation of their belief in an afterlife. All the interviewees come from Perth, Western Australia, which has a population of nearly one and a half million, only a small percentage of whom are priests, pastors, Spiritualists, or qigong teachers. This suggests that worldwide there may be many people who have either levitated or seen someone do it, but whose experiences have not been publicised or researched. Spiritualism may thus be the best field for future levitation researchers to investigate. Night-vision goggles can overcome the problem of unlit séances, or, as the medium Edward reports (in Section 2.3), several experienced mediums could deliberately attempt to levitate someone under normal lighting conditions.

**3) The Lifting Game.** Although the lifting game does not produce full levitation, it seems to involve mass control, so, by using appropriate weighing devices, this



technique may easily produce confirmation that something anomalous, that seems to be a precursor to full levitation, does exist. By monitoring the lifters and sitter appropriately it may also be possible to investigate the connection between the lifting game and brain coherence. Such an experiment would be inexpensive and would not require trained subjects, although stronger results might be obtained if experienced meditators or qigong practitioners were used as sitters and lifters. Mass control could also be investigated without using the lifting game. It would be easy to design an experiment to discover if some people can really reduce their weight merely by concentrating. Sensitive weighing devices linked to a computer could be used and hypnotised subjects, advanced meditators, martial arts practitioners, or people who claim to possess psi abilities would be ideal subjects. Even if they only briefly lost a small percent of their weight, a scientific explanation would be needed. Is this the levitation force at work, and if the person keeps practising to increase the percentage, will he or she eventually rise off the ground?

**4) Hypnosis, Animal Magnetism and Mesmerism.** To investigate reports of somnambulistic or magnetised subjects levitating, it would not be difficult to employ an experienced practitioner of these arts to test various subjects to see if they lift off the ground or lose weight when in an appropriately deep trance. Hypnotists claim that only a small percentage of subjects can be put into a somnambulistic trance, so these are probably the ones that should be tested. Other suitable subjects would be advanced meditators, martial arts practitioners who are sensitive to chi, people who claim to have psi abilities, or some alien abductees.

**5) The God of Gravity?** The example of the orphan who trained himself to link his consciousness with the 'god behind the flame' in order to gain fire immunity (Gaddis, 1968, p.110); Long's (1954, p.356) report about Hawaiian kahunas communicating with the High Self of the weather; and Shah's (1956/1973, p.141) comments about the spirit guarding that law of gravity, illustrate that, with appropriate training, some people can access spiritual entities or universal energies that can confer certain psi abilities. If children are more open to this training than adults, it may be possible to conduct an experiment in which young subjects attempt to sense the god or power behind the weight of a small object. If they can tune into this spiritual force they may be able to levitate the object and eventually perhaps themselves.

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## Appendix

### List of interviewee pseudonyms, classifications and interview dates.

To protect their identities, the ranks of interviewed priests have been omitted. All interviews took place in Perth, Western Australia. A 'levitator' is someone who claims to have levitated.

1. Edward	Spiritualist/levitation witness	26 Nov 2002
2. Laura	Alien abductee/levitator	02 Dec 2002
3. Garry	Spiritualist/levitator	05 Dec 2002
4. Cecil	(interview not used)	13 Dec 2002
5. Alison	Levitator	17 Dec 2002
6. Fred & Sophie	Spiritualists	02 Feb 2003
7. Elizabeth	Spiritualist/levitator	03 Feb 2003
8. Jennifer	Qigong practitioner	07 Feb 2003
9. Claudette	Spiritualist/levitation witness	12 Feb 2003
10. Maude	Spiritualist/levitator	20 Feb 2003
11. Richard	Spiritualist	20 Feb 2003
12. Patrick	Catholic priest	21 Feb 2003
13. Barbara	Spiritualist	24 Feb 2003
14. Kevin	Anglican priest	10 Mar 2003
15. Oliver	Spiritualist/levitation witness	12 Mar 2003
16. Marianne	Spiritualist	12 Mar 2003
17. Amy	Spiritualist	24 Mar 2003
18. Brian	Catholic priest	28 Mar 2003
19. Philip	Catholic pastor	31 Mar 2003
20. Francis	Catholic pastor/levitator	04 Apr 2003
21. Michael	Anglican priest	09 Apr 2003
22. Brendan	Catholic priest	10 Apr 2003
23. Thomas	Catholic priest	15 Apr 2003
24. David	Catholic priest	15 Apr 2003
25. Gordon	Anglican priest	29 Apr 2003
26. Peter	Qigong instructor/levitation witness	08 May 2003
27. William	Qigong instructor/levitation witness	13 May 2003
28. Victor	Qigong instructor	13 May 2003
29. Jeremy	Qigong instructor	20 May 2003
30. Maurice	Qigong instructor	22 May 2003
31. John	Qigong instructor	23 May 2003
32. Bradley	Qigong instructor	27 May 2003
33. Bernard	Qigong instructor	19 June 2003
34. Harry	Qigong instructor	27 June 2003

### People who voluntarily contacted me about this research.

1. Amanda	The lifting game	14 July 2003
2. Noel	Levitation, breath control	15 July 2003
3. Rebecca	Walking on water, levitation	10 May 2003
4. TM practitioner	Hopping while meditating	1 February 2004
5. US businessman	Shirt igniting during qigong healing	June 2003